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A
SHORT HISTORY
OF
GERMAN LITERATURE

BY
PROF. JAMES K. HOSMER

"So viel Einzelnes ist in den Vordergrund gestellt worden, dass der klare Ueberblick über das Ganze fast verloren geht." — Rudolph Gottschall.

SECOND EDITION

ST. LOUIS
G. I. JONES AND COMPANY
1879

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XROY WOB
JUN 19
1881



PREFACE.

If we turn back two hundred years, we find the reading men of England, if they have time to go beyond their own authors, giving their attention, among moderns, to the Italians and Spanish. As yet in Europe only Italy and Spain, besides England, had seen the rise of literatures of sufficient moment to influence the cultivated world beyond the national limits. Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Tasso, Machiavelli had lived, and these are still the greatest Italian names. In Spain, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Calderon had done their work,—work which no succeeding writers of that land have equalled.

If we go back one hundred years, the literature of France has taken the place in the estimation of the English once held by the writers of Spain and Italy; the brilliant men of the age of Louis XIV have laid the world under their spell. In our time, again, the influence of France has been, to a large extent, supplanted. Following especially the lead of two of the most gifted Englishmen of the century, Coleridge and Carlyle, the present generation turns with most reverence to the Germans, often regarding their literature as the most important in the world, after our own, if, indeed, we are to make that exception. It will scarcely be questioned that some knowledge of the history of German literature is, to English-speaking persons, an essential part of thorough culture.

In the account of the adventures of the god Thor

among the giants, as told in the Prose Edda, the story is given of his attempt to lift from the earth the cat of Utgard-Loki, the king of the giants. With all his strength the mortified Thor, lifting the cat's back into an arch, can get only one of her feet from the ground. He is consoled, however, when Utgard-Loki tells him in confidence that the cat was no other than the great Midgard serpent, which encircles the whole earth. The writer is reminded of the story as he thinks of a certain ingenuous, but callow, youth who once undertook to possess himself of a knowledge of German literature, and who, after valiant wrestling, became the victim of chagrin as deep as that which befel the mighty god of the hammer. Certainly the great Midgard serpent, encircling the earth, with its tail in its mouth, is scarcely less appropriate as a symbol of German literature than as a symbol of eternity. Twelve thousand five hundred and sixteen works are said to have been published in Germany in the one year, 1876. Of the writers esteemed of sufficient significance to be noted in a thorough history of literature, the number is legion; in one such history the indices alone, containing little else than names, fill fifty-nine large, closely-printed, double-columned pages. Again, your proper German author has no respect whatever for the eyes or the power of attention of his readers; his conscience assaults him until he gains peace by building his volumes about himself into a towering barricade. Göthe's dramatic pieces alone number more than fifty, and his work in that direction is a trifling part of what he accomplished. Jean Paul wrote between sixty and seventy books, the difficulties of whose style are so great that it has been found necessary to prepare for him a special dictionary. The *selected* works of Hans Sachs, the Nuremberg mastersinger, amount to more than six thousand, and are fairly *corded* into the vast folios in

which they are preserved. Again, if we look at the size of some of the individual books, one of the works of Lohenstein, a dramatist and tale-writer of the seventeenth century, contains alone three thousand quarto pages, its synopsis requiring ninety-six.

Histories of German literature in the German language abound. Several have been translated into English; independent histories have also been attempted by English authors. Of such accounts some are intended for scholars,—great works of reference,—others for popular reading. As regards histories of the latter kind, the present writer believes it to have been a prevailing defect that *perspective* has not been sufficiently considered, and that the attempt has been made to comprehend too much. The German mind has been accused, perhaps with justice, of wanting the instinct of “selection;” it has a passion for being exhaustive, and “writes a subject to its dregs,” discriminating too little between the important and the valueless. By contagion the trouble has communicated itself to English writers who have considered German subjects. In the accounts of German literature may be clearly seen the defects described in the sentence from Rudolph Gottschall, which stands on the title-page of this book as a motto: “So many particulars have been put into the foreground that a clear, comprehensive view of the entire subject is almost utterly lost.” Take, for instance, the excellent work of Gostwick and Harrison. It is correct and thorough; the style is not without a certain picturesque quality. It is excellent as a book of reference; but, as a whole, from its minuteness, quite unreadable. The attention utterly breaks down in the effort to retain the names of unimportant books and individuals; one wanders bewildered in a maze of detail, and obtains no satisfactory general view.

In the present sketch of the history of German litera-

ture, the writer confines himself to one field, "Die schöne Literatur," — Belles-Lettres, Polite Literature. Even with this limitation the sea is practically boundless, and he hardly dares to claim that he has picked up even the Newtonian pebbles. During many years he has read industriously of the immense mass, and can, at any rate, assert that in the pages that follow few names are mentioned in whose case an honest attempt has not been made to reach an estimate at first hand by study of the most characteristic works. The authors mentioned are comparatively few in number. Attention is concentrated upon "epoch-making" men and books, the effort being made to consider these with care. What is of subordinate importance has not been neglected; but the attempt has been made in every case to proportion the amount of light thrown to the significance of the figure which was to receive it.

While I am indebted to a considerable number of critics and scholars, to whom reference is made in the footnotes, I must acknowledge especial obligation to the really vast work of Heinrich Kurz,¹ in which a thorough critical history of German literature is combined with a full and judiciously-made anthology. Immense though the domain of German literature is, it may be almost said that Kurz, in his four compact royal octavos of nine hundred pages each, stands forth as its conqueror. To a large extent, at any rate, he is victor; the pages ranging before us with such wealth of booty, such hosts of captives included within the double columns, marshalled front and rear by his own well-ordered history and critique, that one cannot ask a more perfect subjugation. If a reader were compelled to rely solely upon the work of Kurz for his knowledge of the subject (let him first be sure of his


¹ Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur.

eyesight), he need not consider his information shallow. For the purpose of this book Kurz has been invaluable; beginning, as he does, with the first fruits, and ending with the men who are making themselves known at this very hour. His estimates and discussions, — sometimes translated word for word, sometimes abridged and modified, — have often been used, as the frequent references indicate.

The writer's plan has been so far elastic that he has sometimes permitted himself an historical digression, if in that way he could obtain illustration for some point of the story he has sought to tell. The chapters contain digressions of still another kind. In a tour in Germany, in which the pilgrim followed, perhaps, no unusual track, but proceeded with the somewhat unusual purpose of visiting the spots famous through connection with great writers, much was seen possessing interest. In the idea that a grateful relief might be obtained, the accounts of books are interspersed with descriptions of the homes and haunts of the men who wrote them.

The translations which the book contains, except when it is otherwise specified, are original.





PREFATORY NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

Less than a year has passed since the publication of the "Short History of German Literature," but the publishers feel called upon already to issue a new edition. The author desires to thank the public and the critics for the marks of favor shown to his book. The work has been improved in important ways. The text has been carefully revised, and a full analytical index placed at the end. In an appendix, one or two errors are corrected, and the attempt made to defend some positions of the book which have been made the subject of sharp strictures. The author feels grateful for assurances he has received that what he has written has stimulated readers to make a closer acquaintance with German literature, and hopes his chapters will have a still farther usefulness.

ST. LOUIS, November 15, 1879.

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PART I.—THE FIRST PERIOD OF BLOOM.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNINGS.

The German tongue belongs to the great Aryan family of languages. At a time very remote, the parent speech from which it was derived—from which too were derived in the East the Sanscrit and the Persian, and in the West the Greek, the Latin, the Celtic, and the Slavonic—was spoken somewhere upon the highlands in Central Asia, or perhaps upon a continent, now submerged, lying to the south of Asia, of which the great island-world of Oceanica is a remainder.¹ From indications contained in the descendant languages we may know that the primeval tribe was not utterly rude. Perhaps it was due to a certain degree of civilization they reached that they gained the upper-hand in the early world. At any rate, they multiplied, swarmed forth from their homes, sent emigrants to people India, and westward to take possession of Europe. The Hellenic race, developed from these, plays its part in Greece; as its force expires, the Italic race, in the neighboring peninsula, establishes the glory of Rome. This in turn culminates and decays. Then step upon the scene the Teutons, whose empire was to last far longer, perhaps to be far mightier

¹ Ernst Haeckel: *Schöpfungsgeschichte*.

and more brilliant, than its predecessors ; to what extent grander we cannot say, for the end is not yet.

The name German, full of picturesque suggestion as it is, "Shouters in battle," occurs first in Herodotus, in the fifth century before Christ. They were fully established in Europe when history begins ; yet we cannot assign their immigration to a very ancient date, for at our first knowledge of them the remembrance of their former home remains vivid in the people, expressed in legends, institutions, and social customs. In the time of Alexander the Great, Pytheas of Massilia, a wandering merchant of that colony of Greece, having reached the Baltic shore, gives some account of the Teutons and Guthons ; he was, however, not believed by the writers of his time. It is probable that the Germanic wave, sweeping into Europe from the East, had poured across Russia and thence into Scandinavia, and was now beginning to work southward. Again there is a period of silence until the second century before Christ, when Papirius Carbo, a Roman consul appointed to fight with the Celts in Noricum, comes unexpectedly upon an enemy far more powerful, a vast migrating people, whose men are of huge strength and fierce courage, whose women are scarcely less formidable, whose children are white-haired, like people grown aged, and are bold-eyed and vigorous. Upon their great white shields they slide down the slopes of the Alps to do battle ; they have armor of brass and helmets fashioned into a resemblance of the heads of beasts of prey. The women fight by the side of their husbands ; then, as priestesses, slay the prisoners, letting

the blood run into brazen caldrons that it may afford an omen. Even the Romans are terrified, veterans though they are from the just-ended struggle with Hannibal. Papirius Carbo goes down before them, and Rome expects to see in her streets the blond Northman, as she has just before looked for the dark-skinned Numidian. Caius Marius meets them, 100 B. C., in Southern Gaul, and again in Northern Italy, the front rank of their host—that they may stand firm—bound together, man by man, with a chain, and the fierce women waiting in the rear with up-lifted axes to slay all cowards. But Marius comes off conqueror from the corpse-heaped battle-fields, and Rome has a respite. Within half a century they grapple with the legionaries again, who this time have in their van the sternest heart and strongest head of his great race, Julius Cæsar; and henceforth, for five centuries, there is scarcely an intermission in the wrestle. Drusus, Germanicus, Varus, Claudius, Julian, Valens—these are Roman names that sound as we go down the ages, made memorable by struggle—sometimes successful, sometimes disastrous—with the shouters in battle; Ariovistus, Arminius, Maroboduus, Alaric, Chnodomar, Theodoric—these are the confronting Goths. Dealing blows almost as heavy as he receives, at length the Roman is beaten to his knees, the strength of the vanquished, as in the struggles of fable, passing into the body of the victor. As he drops the sceptre it is seized by the Goth, who becomes imbued moreover with his civilization and his faith; strengthened and ennobled by the gain, he shapes the modern world.

Tacitus, writing in the first century after Christ, with the desire to bring back his degenerating countrymen to nobler standards, portrays for their admiration the Germans, as a purer people. His representation is held to be in all its main traits an accurate one, and is the first extended account. Tacitus speaks of songs sung in honor of the god Tuisco and his son Mannus, of battle-hymns and lays intended for the expression of joy. There was among the Germans no special class of singers like the bards of the Celts, or the scalds of the Scandinavians; minstrelsy was a universal gift among the people. They were not utter barbarians; with several other arts, they understood the use of runes, — a modification of picture-writing. The songs of which the Roman writer speaks have perished, but, as will be seen, not without leaving some trace of themselves in the poetry of the race. Christianity, upon its introduction, destroyed their religion, — in a measure, their nationality. The songs were the clamps which, more strongly than anything else, fastened to them their old heathenism. The missionaries who converted them did what they could to bring these lays into oblivion, encountering them all the more bitterly perhaps because they themselves were to a large extent of a different, often hostile, stock, — Celts, from the island of Britain.

At Upsala, in Sweden, is preserved a venerable relic, the chief treasure of the library of the university. It is a book of purple vellum, whose pages, blackened and mildewed though they are, are still sumptuous, and retain, plainly legible, the charac-

ters written upon them in silver. The binding of the manuscript is also of silver, but that is of a later date, the work of a Swedish noble who wished to enclose in a fitting manner one of the most precious relics of the world. It is the Codex Argenteus, the silver manuscript, the translation made by the Mæso-Goth, Ulfilas, of the Bible, at the end of the fourth century, the earliest memorial in any Teutonic speech. The Codex Argenteus is believed to be very nearly contemporary with Ulfilas, if not from his own hand. This venerable personage, the first name in Teutonic story which becomes famous for other deeds than those which belong to fierce warfare, was a Goth only by adoption, for he was descended from a Christian family of Asia Minor, which had been taken captive. He was thoroughly identified, however, with the race of his captors, becoming their bishop at length, and foremost man. He was a zealous follower of Arius, preaching to his people in Greek, Latin, and Gothic. An interesting hint has been preserved that Ulfilas was thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of the faith he professed, in the circumstance that he omitted in his translation the Book of Kings, lest the minds of his flock might be stimulated by its warlike pictures. The translation is not a mere slavish rendering, but a work of intellect, the dialect of the woods asserting itself vigorously according to its genius, — not straitened to conform to the idioms of more polished tongues. When Ulfilas died, at the age of seventy, the Goths carried his Bible with them to Italy, and thence to Spain. The language in which it is writ-

ten was spoken as late as the ninth century, when it disappeared as a living tongue, and with it its sole memorial.

Greek church historians mention the translation, and so the world knew that such a work had been performed. At length, after centuries, its tattered fragments were disinterred from the rubbish of an old cloister, and, later, carried to Sweden as a prize of the Thirty Years' War. The Bible translation of Ulfilas is the foundation-stone of German literature. With reverent hands the peace-loving teacher placed it, going then to his grave, in the year 388; it lay for ages before the work of construction was continued.

The centuries go. At length we encounter a mighty figure which, whatever be the department of early research engaging attention, demands attentive consideration. I stood once on the bridge which connects the city of Frankfort-on-the-Main with its suburb of Sachsenhausen. Below me rushed through the arches the broad river, the rocks of the shallows showing through the pale green stream. *Frank-furt*, — ford of the Franks. Here it was that, in the dawn of the modern period, a restless race, striving for mastery, poured back and forth through the river barrier. I looked over the parapet, upon the venerable ledges that once felt the Frankish foot-print. The traveller to-day gets over dry-shod, but the builders of the bridge have appropriately set above the central arch a figure that recalls the older memories. A flowing robe wraps the shoulders of the statue; his mighty face

is surmounted by an imperial crown ; his hands bear the insignia of rule. So stands in powerful presentment Karl the Great, — Charlemagne, — upon a spot which once knew him.

The world has produced many an ambitious ruler during the thousand years since his time ; but no one has striven after anything higher than to be set by the side of Karl the Great.¹ Never, perhaps, has a more extraordinary result gone forth from the striving of a mortal. He was brought up as a soldier, and never was soldier greater. In youth he descended into Italy to subdue the Lombards. In Spain, to the west, the Saracens were submitted ; the Slaves and Avars to the east. To the north lived a race never tamed, descendants of the old Cherusci, who, with Hermann, conquered Varus, taking their name appropriately from the *sahs*, the short sword they wielded. At length came the great tamer of men to the Saxons, hitherto indomitable. The clash and tramp of the fierce campaigns that followed is still audible in the pages of old chroniclers. Not until the entire youth of the land was exterminated, and multitudes were exiled, did they submit. The Frankfurt suburb, Sachsenhausen, — houses of the Saxons, — recalls the fact that there a colony of these tough strivers was established in enforced exile. They have some interest to us ; out from their number had gone, some centuries before, Hengist and Horsa ; in England their stormy-spirited cousins in the Heptarchy — at this same time resist-

¹ Giesebrecht: *Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserzeit*.

ing Danish encroachment, judging culprits by jury-trial, and meeting for law-giving in the witenagemote — were at work on the ground-sills of English and American freedom and order.

But Karl the Great was not a soldier through blood-thirstiness or love of tumult. In those wild days the only path to order led across the battlefield, and toward a nobler order the great Frank was always advancing. At Christmas, in the year 800, in Rome, Karl the Great entered the Church of Saint Peter in the robe of a patrician, the dignity he had received from his father. A golden crown was set upon his head; the multitude raised the cry, "Salutation and blessing to the great peace-seeking emperor, Carolus Augustus." Pope Leo III. did reverence at his feet. His empire was vast, — all France and Germany, most of Italy, a large part of Spain. It was won by the sword, but ordered by a power far nobler. His ideal was no other than to establish the kingdom of God upon earth, in which the emperor was to be installed as God's vicar, in order that he might rule all people according to the divine will. He sent out messengers on an apostolic mission to admonish the people to lay virtue to their hearts and remember the judgment-seat of Christ. His glory as a law-giver was greater than that as a soldier. His "capitularies" — the collection of his edicts and ordinances — were the universal code of the empire, a body of wise provisions, the source of inestimable political benefits to all Teuton races, even as the civil life of Rome rested upon the "Twelve Tables." Every important problem with

which politics in succeeding centuries has occupied itself was entertained by him, — even that of free schools for the people.¹ The results of the striving of Karl the Great were sometimes harmful. He went from his own land into Italy, seeking to renew the life of the Roman empire, which had died away. Thus he turned outward the strength of Germany, which was sorely needed at home, — the source of great misfortune afterward, whose bad effects are still to be felt. He established firmly the temporal power of the popes, whence came the unhappy strifes in which the emperors of succeeding times lost their dignity, and their people their lives. Great and wise as he was, he had no superhuman immunity from mistakes.

He was admirable in small things as well as great. He was the best farmer in his empire, saw to everything personally, — even had the reckoning laid before him of every wolf slain on his estates. He gave security to trade, opening roads along the Rhine connecting the Mediterranean with the North Sea ; so from the mouth of the Elbe to the middle of the Danube, with branches to the Black Sea and the Adriatic. With homely friendliness, he cherished the middle and lower classes, seeing that the welfare of the land lay in their prosperity. Princes far and near confessed his greatness. Haroun-al-Raschid, the greatest of the caliphs, sent him an elephant and merry apes ; the king of the Moors, a lion and Numidian bears ; the emperor of Byzantium, an

¹ Giesebrecht.

organ, the first in the land of the Franks. The rich music of the miracle aroused astonishment, as it imitated now the rolling of thunder, now the sweet tone of lyre and cymbal. The hospitality of Karl the Great was profuse. So many strangers came to his court, it became at length a serious burden. It was a many-colored company. Near the monk from Italy, who could make Latin verses in the emperor's praise, stood, in the ante-room, the Saracen chief from Spain, with robe and turban covered with jewels. There were conquered Saxon chiefs in long linen robes, Lombard counts in short purple mantles set off with peacock feathers, Avars with long plaited hair, gorgeous ambassadors from Byzantium, brown Arabs, and slender Persians. These were the guests, and among them many a wild warrior stretched his giant limbs, spending the interval between battle and battle in boasting of his achievements. "How were you pleased with Bohemia?"¹ it was asked of one. "The people are little worms," was the reply. "Seven or eight I spitted, like larks, and carried them hither and thither on my lance. I do not know what they grumbled meanwhile. It was not worth while for the emperor and me to put on our helmets on their account."

It is hard to touch upon a character so commanding as Karl the Great without being led to inappropriate lengths by the fascination he exerts. We have now no concern with the magnificent figure

¹ Gustav Freytag: *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit*.


except as he affected literature. He scarcely learned to read until he became a king, but he was a learner until his death. That he wrote himself, we can hardly say ; but he stimulated marvellously the intellectual life of others. Out of the old German songs which his race — taught by the monks — was beginning to despise, came to the emperor the breath of a noble life. He comprehended them as no one before him had done, and caused a collection to be made of the lays of the ancient heroes. To him is due also the first German grammar. He encouraged the clergy, because he saw in them the bearers of all higher intellectual culture ; they in turn worked for him with enthusiasm, preaching in German instead of Latin, and translating books. He called to his assistance the first scholars of Italy and England : notably, Peter of Pisa, Paulus Diaconus, Alcuin, and Eginhard. He allowed no original impulse of the Teutonic nature to fail, but disciplined each one, ennobled it, and so made it capable of maturing more beautiful blossoms and more useful fruit than before.¹ He set within the earthy Teuton a Promethean spark, kindling within him the possibilities of a fine spiritual and intellectual life, — a fire that has not been quenched through the ages. No other man in all succeeding time has so influenced German development. No human being has ever made a deeper impress upon the world. The plain citizen revered him as the fatherly friend of the people and the just judge ; chivalry held him to be the first of knights ;

¹ Giesebrecht.

the Church has made him a saint ; he is as famous in poetry as in history.

Impressive pictures have come down to us respecting his person and bearing. In height he was seven times the length of his own foot, and nobly proportioned. His body never hindered his spirit. He fought with wild bulls in the forest of Ardennes, such was his force, and for more than thirty years he had no sickness. His brow was open, his eyes large and quick, his hair thick and fine, and, in age, of venerable whiteness ; his countenance cheerful. His usual garb was a linen robe, woven at home by the women of his family, and over it the flowing Frisian mantle. He avoided pomp, although about him were vassals appointed to be models of splendid knightly discipline. These paladins surrounded him, it is said, as the stars the sun ; he darkened them all.

There is no character concerning whom the traditions are more picturesque. In the Germanic Museum at Nuremberg I remember a great painting by Kaulbach, illustrating what is perhaps the most striking story of all. When Karl the Great died, at Aachen, in 814, a sepulchre was constructed in which he was placed, sitting upon a throne — not in his simple Frisian mantle, but in the royal pomp which in life he had sometimes upon occasion assumed — in imperial robes, with a crown upon his head and a book of the Gospels, bound in gold, upon his knees. A century and a-half later the young emperor, Otto III, after a drinking-bout, broke into the tomb with a party of boon companions. There sat upon the throne the majestic figure, unwasted, save that the



beard, grown long, swept his breast. It was as if decay had not dared to approach him ; he was too great to crumble into dust ; the tomb-breakers recoiled abashed. It is a fine subject for Kaulbach, who renders it with great power, — the gloom of the sepulchre, the recoiling revellers, and before them the towering form of the buried emperor, with his sweeping beard, and the golden book of the Gospels resting upon his knees.

At Vienna the visitor goes to see the treasure-chamber of the House of Hapsburg. It is an Aladdin's cave, where, from the heaped-up abundance of gold and precious stones, the heads of people are well-nigh turned, and the guards stationed everywhere are obliged to watch, not only those who might rob, but those who might become insane. There one may see extraordinary relics by the hundred. The metal circlet yonder, Wallenstein held when he dealt with incantations in his gloomy seclusion. This cradle the great Napoleon rocked, his heart full of the tenderest yearning that ever filled it, for it held for him his only child, the baby king of Rome. There hangs the great Florentine diamond, — the fourth in the world, — which was worn in battle as a talisman by Charles the Bold of Burgundy, and found upon his body after the battle of Nancy, in 1477 ; and there, more interesting than these, is the great imperial crown of Germany, coming down from an unknown antiquity, passed from brow to brow down the long line of kaisers, with its huge uncut jewels and heavy masses of gold, rudely wrought by some primeval artificer. But more interesting than all,

to me, was a relic side by side with this, — the golden book of the Gospels which rested so long upon the knees of Charlemagne in the tomb at Aachen !

The great empire of Karl the Great fell, at his death, into confusion, and at first all that had been gained seemed to be lost. Not until one hundred years later do we see signs that once more a spirit of order is beginning to move on the face of the chaos. At the beginning of the tenth century appears Henry the Fowler, a Saxon, and for the next hundred years the rulers of the empire come from the tough race which Karl the Great had found it such a task to subdue. There are great names in the time during which the Saxon dynasty is powerful ; so too among the Franconian princes who succeed them. As regards the present subject, however, those ages are nearly dumb ; the history of their literature is almost a blank. When Karl the Great had gone, the monks destroyed the collection he had made of the poetry of the nation. In the cloister of Reichenau, in the year 821, we know that twelve heroic poems were preserved which were part of it, and scholars are not entirely without hope of some day finding them ; but it has not yet come to pass. The sole fragment of heroic song extant from this period is the Hildebrand's Lied, — Lay of Hildebrand, — concerning which the interesting and probable conjecture has been made that its preservation is due to the leisure — probably the *ennui* — of two old monks who had once been soldiers. Hundreds of the rough fighters of those days, when the strength of youth had departed, sought the asylum of the monasteries, —

the head that had worn the helmet submitting to the tonsure. The songs of their warrior life would remain in their memories, and in the tedium of the cloister what more natural than that they should sometimes be sung under the breath, full of heathenism though they were! Once, at such a time, while one veteran sang or dictated another wrote down on blank leaves at the beginning and end of a service-book the profane, half-Pagan lines of the Hildebrand's Lied. It was its fate to be handed down, and the parchment is kept at Cassel as one of the principal manuscript treasures of Germany.¹

To the songs of the heroes succeeds a literature of the Church. Of such culture as existed the monasteries were the seats, noteworthy among which were Fulda, in Hesse, and Saint Gallen, in Switzerland. From these came many translations and paraphrases which have no interest except of a linguistic kind. A work of a different order is the Heliand, meaning the Saviour, a poem of the tenth century, from the lately converted Saxons, which has interesting traits, representing Christ in the character of a great prince of the German people. The Ludwig's Lied celebrates a victory of Louis the Pious, son of Karl the Great, over the Normans. Now too, at Weissembourg, in Alsace, the monk Otfried writes his gospel harmony, a paraphrase of the evangelists, of some interest as being the first example of German rhyme.

With these few pages the beginnings of our subject are sufficiently considered. To the twelfth

¹ Vilmar: *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*.

century the story of German literature is a meagre one; and who will wonder? The wild Teutons, wandering through unknown ages, in unknown places, encounter at length the outposts of Rome. With eyes unopened to civilization, they strike at the new foe, who at length goes down before their barbarian fury. Little by little Goth and Vandal penetrate to the centre of Roman power; gradually to their savage souls comes a sense of the grace and majesty they are overwhelming, and at length they stand before the ruins they have made, awe-struck.¹ For a next step they reverently appropriate the culture and faith of the empire they have vanquished. Upon the brow of the warrior the brazen helmet takes the place of the head of the wolf or the bear slain in the chase; life is no longer regulated by the rude forest legislation, but by the Pandects; in place of the victims offered to Tuisco and Mannus comes the symbolic sacrifice of the mass. But as the Teutons pressed upon Rome, they in turn are pressed upon. To the eastward the Avars must be beaten back; to the westward the fanatic Saracens, sweeping through Spain toward the heart of Europe. Soon comes war to the death with the encroaching Slave; and scarcely is he restrained when the Hun is upon the people with sword and scourge. The story of those times is one of mighty striving for life and place. The rudely wrought gold and uncut jewels of that old imperial crown at Vienna rest upon the head of many a powerful leader. The

¹ Bryce: *The Holy Roman Empire*.

pages of the chroniclers are dark now with tales of treachery, now bright with heroism ; now lamentation over a province devastated, now rejoicing over success. The Teuton wins the mastery ; rapine and death are no longer constantly near at hand ; tumult and anxiety subside ; there is space at length for the graces and refinements of life.

It has been said that German poetry has had two periods of bloom : the later, from the middle of the eighteenth century through the first quarter of the nineteenth ; the earlier, from the end of the first quarter of the twelfth century to the middle of the thirteenth.¹ To this earlier period we have now come. We leave behind the Old High German, which has been the vehicle of the earliest literature ; the Middle High German has supplanted it. In place of the few memorials nearly valueless except for historical and linguistic purposes, we come upon a literature abundant in quality, and in every way interesting in its character. From the year 1137 to 1254 the emperors of Germany were from the great family of Hohenstauffen, rulers superbly gifted, under whom the land attained such grandeur as it has never since possessed. First of the line stands the mighty Barbarossa, Red-Beard. Unmatched was his power in Germany, Italy, the Holy Land. Great in council he was, great in strife. Before the door of his tent was hung, high upon a lance, his shield, as a sign that he was ready, upon summons,

¹ D. F. Strauss.

to redress all wrongs.¹ His life went out in Syria, and presently, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, a figure not less fine inherits the sceptre, — his grandson, Friedrich II. With the politics of the period we have no concern. In the world of letters a brilliancy may be discerned commensurate with the power and prestige which the nation had reached. As the Germans emerge from the night of barbarism, for a time, as we have seen, the monks alone are the writers, — at work with scriptural comment, with homily, now and then with a chronicle. With the Hohenstauffen, however, the courts of princes become the centres of culture; from Southern France the lyres of the troubadours strike the key-note of chivalric song, and in Germany springs up the race of Minnesingers.

Let us call up a picture of the mediæval life in order to understand the conditions under which the poetry that has come down to us from this time took its rise. The forest is disappearing, but the edge of the horizon is yet wooded, and many parts of the plain are still heavily shadowed. In low places, between cultivated ground, are frequent ponds and marshes. The number of villages and farms is probably not less than at the present time, although they are not so populous. Between the crop and the wood, upon some mountain spur or the edge of the wilderness, rises the chapel of a saint. In the villages everywhere are towers, whence on feast-days, bells ring from one plain to another

¹ Von Raumer: *Geschichte der Hohenstauffen*.

through the whole land, to whose light peal the mighty humming of a greater bell from some town in the distance gives the foundation-tone. In the river valleys, in the midst of houses and surrounded by strong walls, rise the towers of cathedrals. On the other side, opposite the town, stands, on the hill-summit, a walled tower, with narrow windows, the possession of the lord of the region, and the home of some trooper-vassal, who keeps house up there,—not to the joy of the peasant. Cities have just sprung up, as it were, overnight; in the case of many it cannot be said when they began, nor did their builders know how immeasurable was to be the benefit to their descendants.¹

In the winter, the sun setting early, the knight and his retainers are driven to shelter from the foray or hunting, which occupy the short day; the feast is disposed of,—then come many hours of unbroken darkness before the day begins again. Consider how dull the winter evenings must have been in a German mediæval castle! What substitutes had they for such intellectual excitements as are now supplied by our newspapers, our prolific literature of fiction, our theatres, and highly-developed music? Often the snow chokes the narrow horse-paths through the forest, so that the day as well as the night must pass in inaction. How spend the weary hours but by hearing the minstrel! He has been trained to arms, but he devotes himself in the prime of life to the study of versification, wandering on

¹ Freytag: *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit*.

from court to court, and there, in the presence of ladies, singing his songs to tunes of his own composing. His face is studious and melancholy; he accompanies himself with a lute. The logs are heaped high in the fire-place; the torches flare and smoke about the walls. In the wavering glare the cups of ale and trenchers loaded with flesh stand on the table. The knight and his followers—their armor thrown aside, but their leathern garments showing the stain and imprint from the steel that so often covers them—alternately revel and listen. Somewhat apart, on a dais perhaps, or in some overlooking balcony, sits the castle's mistress, with her ladies. The labor of the castle household goes forward. The yeoman strings his bow afresh, or replenishes his quivers; skins are sewed into garments; jesses are made for the falcons and leashes for the dogs; the ladies are busy with the embroidery of scarfs; the serving-women go in and out. Meanwhile the minstrel strikes vigorously his rude instrument, singing song after song, or reciting by the hour his rhythmical story. His voice rings often through a tumult; he closes his song, to resume it the next day if the storm prevents the chase, or when evening again comes round.


What the knight had in the castle the peasant and burgher in the plain below would imitate in a humbler way. At the other end of the scale, in the courts of princes, there was a scene far more brilliant,—halls with magnificent hangings; guests in garments bought of merchants fresh from Venice, laden with splendid fabrics from the East; the gleam

of gold, the flash of jewels. When it happened that the castle lord, or the master of the hut, or the king in the palace, was a man of ready mind and lively fancy, we can understand how he too should have sometimes remembered strains, to repeat them, or indeed himself have invented lays. So did many a plain farmer; so did Walther von der Vogelweide and Hartmann von Aue; in a higher rank so did Duke Heinrich of Breslau, the Kaiser Friedrich II., and the princes, his sons, and, in another land, Richard Cœur de Lion.

Of the poetry of the Hohenstauffen period a broad division into two classes may be made: first, what was current among the people; second, what was liked in the courts and castles. To the popular poetry belong certain great epics, founded upon national traditions which for centuries, the monks had tried to crush out,—with partial success,—and yet which, tough as the bears in the woods from which they came, in many instances lived on tenaciously in the mouths of the folk. In the courts and castles, however, when the crusades had begun to bring the Germans into contact with the outside world,—the chivalry of France sweeping along the highways and down the streams, and the Italian cities, with their finer life, becoming known,—there was an aping of foreign models; the old national material seemed far too rough, and the minstrels translated or rewrought the stories of troubadour and trouvère. The line of division between the two classes is not precise. Although it was utterly unfashionable, a national subject sometimes received a

hearing in a castle hall ; a story of the troubadours sometimes reached a peasant's hearth. There are poets coming from both directions who approach — sometimes stand on — the dividing line.¹ Speaking generally, however, the broad division may be made into *Court* and *Popular Poetry* ; the former is characterized by a preference for foreign subjects and a finer structure ; the latter by a preference for Teutonic traditions, and by a rougher form. The Popular Poetry will be first considered.

¹ August Koberstein : Geschichte der deutschen National Literatur.



CHAPTER II.

THE NIBELUNGEN LIED.

Of the bequests made to us of the Popular Poetry of the time of the Hohenstauffen, by far the most important, in fact the most important literary memorial of any kind, is the epic of between nine and ten thousand lines known as the Nibelungen Lied. The manuscripts which have preserved for us the poem come from about the year 1200. For full a thousand years before that, however, many of the lays from which it was composed had been in existence; some indeed proceed from a still remoter antiquity, sung by primitive minstrels when the Germans were at their wildest, untouched by Christianity or civilization. These lays had been handed down orally, until at length a poet of genius elaborated them and intrusted them to parchment. What may have been that poet's name cannot be said with certainty. Although no doubt a man of courtly culture, he took the songs current on the lips of the people, racy with their life, adapting them with skill, while retaining all their spirit. The work of the unknown genius who wrote the Nibelungen Lied has come, in our time, to be prized immeasurably. It is set side by side with Homer; it is reverently studied by minds of the highest power; it has be-

come a text-book in the schools, as containing figures worthy to become the ideals of youth.

Who are the Nibelungen, concerning whom the lay is written? It is a race of supernatural attributes who are possessed of a certain wonderful treasure or hoard. Siegfried, the hero of the poem, has wrested from them this treasure, and thereby obtained immeasurable wealth. He has also found a mantle which has power to make its wearer invisible, and a sword, "Balmung," a blade of the truest. "Vain were it to enquire where that Nibelungen land especially is; its very name is Nebel-land,—mist-land. The Nibelungen, that muster in thousands and tens of thousands, though they march to the Rhine or Danube, and we see their strong limbs and shining armor, we could almost fancy to be children of the air."¹

We cannot tell where their land is. Siegfried has subdued them and taken their treasure; henceforth he and his followers are called Nibelungen. In fact, to whomsoever, for the time being, the treasure has been transferred, the name Nibelungen is assigned. After Siegfried's death, when, as we shall see, the hoard falls to his slayers, they in turn are spoken of as the Nibelungen, the name passing with the possession. Before the opening of the poem, Siegfried, the hero, has made himself famous. He has not only conquered the mysterious Nibelungen, but slain in fight a remarkable dragon; bathing in his blood, he has made himself invulnerable.

¹ Carlyle: *The Nibelungen Lied*.

I will give now, without further preface, the story of the Nibelungen Lied, reserving for another chapter a more particular account of its origin and preservation, and a development of its beauties and lessons. In arranging the story for a brief presentment, I have made much use of the account of the enthusiastic literary historian, Vilmar, the most picturesque and beautiful which I have met, and preserving well, too, the spirit of the original. The poem has simple and child-like traits; it has, too, aspects of horror; aspects, too, of the highest nobleness. We also are Teutons. Think, as you read, that you are looking into the foretime of our own race, beholding the lineaments of our fathers long ago.

In the land of the Burgundians, in the old royal castle at Worms on the Rhine, Kriemhild, the noble daughter of a king, after her father's early death, grew into blooming maidenhood. Dreams full of presage for the future hovered about her in her sleep, in the quiet retirement in which she passed her youth. She dreamed she was cherishing a falcon, when two eagles swooped down and killed it before her eyes. Full of sorrow, she awoke and told her dream to Ute, her mother. "The falcon," said the mother, "is a noble spouse for whom thou art destined; may God preserve him from being early lost." "Unless I love a hero," said Kriemhild, "I will remain a maid until death."

Cheerful in his joyous and manly youth, Siegfried, meanwhile, in the Netherlands, son of an old king

and queen, already had grown from a boy into a hero, and wandered through many lands. He heard at length about the beautiful maid at Worms, far up the Rhine. In order to woo her he left home, with his followers. Before the king's palace at Worms the strangers came riding, their horses and trappings finer than were ever before seen. Hagen of Tronei, retainer of the king, is sent for—who knows all foreign lands—to tell who they are. “They must be princes or princes’ messengers,” he says. “Wherever they come from, they are noble-spirited heroes. It can be only Siegfried who rides there so proudly,—he who conquered the race of the Nibelungen, and took from them the uncounted treasure of jewels and red gold; who won in battle the mantle that makes one invisible; the same Siegfried who also slew the dragon and bathed himself in his blood, so that his skin became as invulnerable as horn. Such heroes we should receive as friends.” Gunther, the king, and his brethren, Gernot and Gieseher, —brethren, too, of Kriemhild,—receive him hospitably. Joyous tournaments take place. Kriemhild catches stolen glances from her window, and forgets her work and play. Siegfried remains a year at Worms before he sees the maid he has come to woo. Meantime he marches forth, as a warlike comrade of the heroes of Burgundy, to strife. Messengers hurry back from the army to the Rhine to announce victory. “Now give me good news,” says Kriemhild. “I will give you all my gold.” “No one,” says the herald, “has ridden more nobly into battle than the guest from the Netherlands.

The captives you will see, his heroic might subdued and sent hither." The king's daughter bade give the messenger ten marks of gold, and rich clothing. Then she stood silent at the narrow window, watching the road on which the victors were to return to the Rhine, until she saw the rejoicing knights and the happy tumult at the castle gates. At length a great tournament is held, on the joyful Easter festival; from far and near approach the highest and the best. Then, at last, standing at her mother's side, surrounded by a hundred chamberlains, who carry swords, and a hundred glittering ladies of noble rank, Kriemhild appears in public, and she goes forth like the dawn from troubled clouds,—in the gentle brightness of youth and beauty. "How can I help loving her," says Siegfried. "It is a foolish illusion, but I would rather die than abandon thee." The hero bends courteously before her; the might of love draws them towards each other, but as yet no word is exchanged. At length, after the mass with which the festival begins, the maid thanks the hero for the brave help rendered to her brothers. "That was done in your service, Kriemhild," is his reply; but when the sports are done, he prepares to return to his home, heavy-hearted, for he despairs of success.

There was a queen, Brunhild, beyond the sea, of wonderful beauty, but also of wonderful strength. In contest with men who desired her love she leaped, and threw the lance; whoever was defeated was beheaded; only to a victor would she surrender herself. Already had many a brave man sought her,

only never more to return. Then Gunther, king of the Burgundians, resolved to risk his life for her love, and summoned Siegfried to help him. Siegfried consents, if Gunther will give him for his wife his sister, Kriemhild. This, Gunther vows to do, and the ship is prepared for departure, furnished forth with gold-colored shields and rich garments. After a sail of twelve days they reach the Isenstein, where Brunhild rules. Now begin the contests ; but Gunther, unable to maintain himself against the demon power of the maid, is helped by Siegfried, who puts on his obscuring mantle, to fight invisibly. He stands at Gunther's side, and bids him only make the motions of a fighter. Now Brunhild throws the spear, and the sparks fly, as from flames blown by the wind, from the shield of her opponent, upon which it strikes. Siegfried trembles, but soon stands firm again, and throws Gunther's spear at the maid with yet wilder strength. She catches it upon her shield, but falls ; then, angry at her defeat, she runs to the stone which has been brought into the ring by twelve heroes. She, however, raises it alone, and with her powerful arm slings it far away, then leaps after it, so that her armor rings aloud. But Siegfried, tall and quick, hurls the stone far beyond the mark of the maid ; then catching the king under his arm, he leaps farther than the leap of Brunhild. The queen immediately turns to her retinue : " Maids and men, approach ; you are all to be subject to King Gunther." The end is reached. As Brunhild is betrothed with Gunther, so is Kriemhild with Sieg-

fried. In sight of the kings, Kriemhild receives the kiss which plights their faith. But tears fell down the cheeks of the proud, beautiful Brunhild. Astonished and anxious, because his conscience accuses him, Gunther asks for the cause of the tears, and Brunhild answers: "For Kriemhild, thy sister, I weep, because she is to be debased by marriage to a vassal."

Brunhild, although vanquished, again shows her unmanageable warrior spirit. On the evening of the wedding-day she wrestles again with Gunther, who, no longer having Siegfried's help, is shamefully vanquished, and bound with the girdle of his bride. She winds this about his hands and feet, and hangs him by it to a hook fastened in the wall; he is set free only after much begging. Sad and ashamed, the next day he tells Siegfried, who again assumes his obscuring mantle, wrestles with Brunhild, and a second time subdues her.

For a time all misfortune slumbers. Siegfried with his young wife goes joyfully home to his parents. His father yields to his son crown and kingdom. For ten years they enjoy their happiness in entire peace, — Siegfried, ruler of the Netherlands, and of the realm of the Nibelungen, with their innumerable treasures, the most powerful of kings; Kriemhild the most beautiful and happy of queens. But in Brunhild's heart the anger still burns. "How does Kriemhild dare behave so proudly toward us," she cries, "as not to visit us once in all this time. Is not Siegfried your vassal? Yet for ten long years he has rendered us no service."

Gunther yields, and sends messengers to Siegfried. They invite him to a great festival, which at the solstice — the old German festival time — is to be celebrated at the Burgundian court at Worms. With a retinue of a thousand nobles, Siegfried and Kriemhild, accompanied by Siegfried's father, in the secure cheerfulness of innocence, go to Worms on the Rhine. Rich gifts of red gold and gleaming jewels are borne along, that Siegfried may be generous at the Burgundian court.

A splendid reception awaits the guests, for thousands of knights from all the roads come streaming into the gates of the royal city. In magnificent attire the kings ride, with their retinue, through the streets; the noble ladies and beautiful maidens, handsomely adorned, sit at the windows. The sound of trumpets and flutes fills the great city by the Rhine until it rings with music; but notwithstanding all, the air is full of boding. The two queens — Kriemhild and Brunhild — sit together as ten years before. "I have a husband," says the happy Kriemhild, "who deserves to possess all these kingdoms." That was the spark which kindled fire. "How is that possible," says Brunhild, gloomily. "These realms belong to Gunther, and will remain subject to him." Kriemhild fails to catch the tone of gathering anger, and continues, less guardedly: "Seest thou how he stands there, — how he walks so grandly before the heroes, like the moon before the stars? Therefore it is that my heart so rejoices." Brunhild replies: "To Gunther belongs precedence among all kings. When thy brother won me as a

wife, Siegfried himself said he was Gunther's serving-man, and so I have considered him ever since. He is and shall remain subject to us." Then breaks forth Kriemhild's anger: "Siegfried is indeed nobler than Gunther, my brother; we will see whether I shall not have precedence over thee when we go into the cathedral to-day."

Before the minster the quarrel is renewed with greater bitterness. After stinging words, Kriemhild repents, and adds, "Thou art thyself to blame that we have fallen into this strife. It is hateful to me, and for true heart friendship I shall always again be prepared." But the words have been too bitter. Brunhild falls into cruel desire for revenge. Siegfried laments the strife. "They have forgotten themselves," he thinks. "Let us be silent about what has happened, and let our wives be as silent as we." But Brunhild, lamenting in weak rage, sits solitary in her room. There Hagen finds her, and learns from her more particularly how she has been injured. The man must die. The three kings, Gunther, Gernot, and Gieseler, are summoned in council. Only the youngest, Gieseler, considers the affair a woman's contest, — too trifling to bring death to a hero like Siegfried. The rest agree to spread a false report of war; the army is to be summoned, and since, plainly, Siegfried will not be absent from the march, the hero shall be slain in the campaign.

Then the cruel Hagen goes to Kriemhild to take farewell, according to custom. She has already half forgotten the quarrel, and not the slightest

suspicion comes into her mind that she has before her the implacable enemy of her husband, who, in his fealty to his queen, has sworn his death. "Hagen," she says, "thou art my kinsman. To whom can I better trust my husband's life in the war than to thee? Protect Siegfried! To be sure he is invulnerable, but when he bathed himself in the dragon's blood, a broad linden leaf fell between his shoulder-blades, so that this place was not wet by the blood, and remained unprotected." "Sew a sign for me, royal lady," says the traitor, "on this place on his garment, so that I may know exactly how to protect him." Kriemhild sews with her own hand a cross of fine silk on Siegfried's dress, — the mark for his bloody death. Next day the march begins, and Hagen, riding close to Siegfried, sees the sign. From a campaign the expedition becomes a great hunt; Siegfried sees Kriemhild for the last time, while threatening visions trouble her soul, as formerly, when she dreamed of the falcons and the eagle in her childhood. Now she sees two mountains fall upon Siegfried, he vanishing among the ruins.

The hunt is finished; the heroes — Siegfried first (who has slain the most game) — are thirsty and tired with the chase under the heat of the sun. There is no more wine; the Rhine is distant; there is no chance for the refreshment they desire. Hagen, however, knows of a spring in the wood near by, the Odenwald, and thither he advises them to go. Already they see the broad linden under whose roots the cool spring bubbles forth. Then

Hagen begins: "It has often been said that no one can follow the quick Siegfried; let us try it now." "Let us run for a wager," replies Siegfried, "as far as the spring." When the race begins, like wild panthers spring Gunther and Hagen through the forest, but Siegfried is first at the goal. Quietly now he lays away his arms, waiting until the king comes up, that he may drink first. Gunther comes up and drinks; after him Siegfried bends down to the spring. Hagen, leaping forward, quietly puts the arms out of Siegfried's reach, then takes the spear in his murderous hand; while the hero is taking his last draught, Hagen throws the javelin through the cross on his back, so that the heart's blood streams over the slayer. In wrath the wounded hero springs to his feet, grasping after sword and bow, but finds no weapon. Then he clutches his shield and rushes upon Hagen. Wrathfully he smites the traitor with his shield, so that the jewels with which it is set are scattered about, and the wood resounds with the fury of the blows. Then his cheek grows pale, and his limbs totter. Kriemhild's husband falls among the flowers, and the blood pours from his death-wound.

With his last breath he turns angrily upon his murderers.

"You have repaid my fidelity by slaying your kinsman."

Many a lamentation is heard,—among others the voice of Gunther, whose heart fails him,—but the grim Hagen pours out scorn upon those bewailing, and upon the man shamefully murdered. "I know

not why you lament ; now comes to an end that which we have borne with sorrow and care. Well for me that I have slain this one !” Once more the hero speaks : “ I sorrow for nothing so much as for my wife, Kriemhild. If you mean, noble King Gunther, ever again to be faithful to any one in your life, to you do I commend her. Let it be well for her that she is your sister.” Far around the flowers of the forest are reddened with his blood, for the death-struggle has ended. Then the lords, according to old custom, place the hero’s corpse on a gold-red shield, and bear it to Worms on the Rhine. Some advise to say that robbers have killed him. But Hagen cries, “ What care I though Kriemhild hears that I have killed him? She has injured Brunhild so much, I hold her sorrow to be but a slight thing. She may weep as much as she will.” And the terrible Hagen, when by night they reached Worms, had the corpse laid before the house where Kriemhild dwelt, well knowing that she herself would find it there when, according to custom, she went to matins. A chamberlain, going first in the gray dawn with a light, sees the corpse. “ My lady,” he cries, “ remain. A slain knight lies before the gate.” Kriemhild’s answer is a loud cry of terror. Well she recognizes in the pale torch-light the heroic figure and the noble features stiffened in death. Loud lamenting fills, far and wide, the halls and courts. The faithful associate themselves for revenge ; Kriemhild can scarcely restrain them. “ It is not now time for revenge ; hereafter it will come.” When the corpse lies upon the bier,

the kings, her brothers, come, and her kindred. Hagen, too, stalks forward without shame. Kriemhild waits at the bier for the judgment. If the murderer steps near the murdered, or touches his body, the wounds will open and blood flow afresh. As Hagen approaches, the wounds flow. "God will revenge the deed!" cries Kriemhild. The corpse is put into its coffin and borne to the grave, Kriemhild following, almost in a death-struggle with unspeakable woe. Once more she desires to see the beautiful head of her husband; the costly coffin, ornamented with gold and silver, is broken open in the cathedral; with white hand she raises the hero's head and presses a kiss on the pale lips. Then Siegfried is buried.

While Siegfried's father and the Nibelungen return to the Netherlands, Kriemhild is fixed to the spot where her love began,—where it ended in cruel woe. Her life has fully gone out into the grand hero who was hers. She has henceforth only two feelings,—suffering and revenge. She passes thirteen years at Worms, in deep mourning. To appease their sister, the kings, her brothers, have the immeasurable treasure in jewels and gold which lies in the Nibelungen land—the Nibelungen hoard—brought thence. Twelve wagons go four days and nights in order to bring it from the hollow mount where it is hidden, to the ship. It arrives, and is given to Kriemhild; henceforth the Burgundians are called Nibelungen. But again the grim Hagen steps as an enemy in her way, for he fears she may, by her generosity from it, win so many to her service

that it may do injury to the power of the king himself. He accordingly sinks the Nibelungen hoard in the Rhine, and there it lies, according to the tradition of the people, between Worms and Lorsch, until this day. At length comes the time for revenge.

When Kriemhild has mourned for Siegfried thirteen years, in distant Hungary dies the wife of Etzel, or Attila, king of the Huns. His vassal, Rüdiger of Bechlarn, persuades him to woo a new spouse, — Kriemhild. Rüdiger is at once sent westward with this commission. As he arrives at Worms, Hagen cries out in surprise, "For a long time I have not seen Rüdiger, but from the bearing of this messenger I must think that he is that bold and skilful soldier." Great joy follows over the meeting, for they have known each other at Etzel's court. There is a hospitable reception, and, on the part of Rüdiger, stately wooing. Hagen disapproves the suit. "If Kriemhild becomes queen of the Huns, you will all see she will do us as much harm as she can. It becomes heroes to avoid sorrow." Lo! the black wings of foreboding expand themselves before new, terrible suffering, and this dark presage will not cease until it is completed in horror. Kriemhild at first steadfastly refuses. Her brothers, Gieseler and Gernot, say to her, "If any one can turn away thy sorrow, that can Etzel do; from the Rhone to the Rhine, from the Elbe to the sea, there is no king so powerful as he. Be happy that he has a mind to choose you to be the sharer of his splendid power." Rüdiger's requests, how-

ever, cannot move her, until he says, "Every one who does you an injury shall atone for it heavily through our hand." Then the sorrowing one rises, suddenly revived by the thought of revenge. What thoughts lurk in her torn heart Rüdiger does not know. Kriemhild reaches to him her hand in assent, and soon she goes with Rüdiger on the journey to the land of the Huns, her brothers accompanying her as far as the Danube. Then she proceeds to Rüdiger's castle, where she is lovingly received by Götlinde, the margrave's wife. After short rest, the train, which continually becomes more numerous, goes forward, until at last she is received by Etzel. Twenty-four tributary princes are in his suite, who all do reverence to Kriemhild. And who stands there at the head of a troop of horsemen whose faces look defiantly from their wolf helmets? Of lofty, almost gigantic, stature, he is like a lion in his shoulders and loins, which seem cast out of bronze. Of proud and noble countenance, he is like Siegfried, only Siegfried's cheerful youth is changed in this case into the firm, deep earnestness of the ripened man, on whose head the storms of heavy fate have already raged. About his full hair the coronal of a king is wound; his strong left hand holds the sword-hilt; the powerful right hand rests on the lion shield. It is the great hero of German tradition, the king of the Ostrogoths, Dietrich of Berne, — the mightiest hero of his time, — with Hildebrand, his vassal, and the rest of his troop, now a guest at Etzel's court, until he shall return victoriously into the land and dominion of his

fathers. All these bands, making up together an army which stretches out of sight, march now, surrounding the royal pair, down to Vienna, where a marriage festival is celebrated, lasting seventeen days, — with lavish splendor and innumerable gifts. But Kriemhild, in the midst of the magnificence, thinks how she once dwelt on the Rhine, by the side of the noble Siegfried; her eyes become wet with tears, which she is forced to conceal. The foreign land never becomes her home. For seven years she sits with Etzel under the crown of the land of the Huns; then she bears a son, who is named at baptism Ortlieb. Again six years pass, so that twenty-six years have gone since Siegfried fell at the linden spring in the Odenwald. Then comes the time of revenge.

“Long years have I been in a foreign land,” she says, at length, to Etzel, “and yet no one of my noble relatives has visited me here. I cannot longer bear the absence of my kindred, for they say already here, since none of my house seek me out, I am fugitive and banished, — without kin and home.” Etzel, ready to help her, sends messengers to Worms without delay, inviting them to a festival at the next solstice, at his castle in Hungary. When the messengers reach Worms, the kings hesitate long whether to accept the invitation. Hagen earnestly opposes its acceptance: “You will declare war upon yourselves; you know what we have done to Kriemhild; that I slew her husband with my own hand; we shall only lose in Etzel’s land honor and life. Kriemhild has only thoughts of revenge.”

The warning is unheeded. Hagen only succeeds in inducing them to go well guarded ; all vassals are summoned. Joyfully they come, and among them a new hero, who now steps into the foreground, the bold, joyous Volker von Alzei, a gleeman who understands the fiddle and singing, and is, at the same time, of great prowess in war.

Etzel's messengers return and announce the success of their mission. Kriemhild, in terrible joy that she has at last reached her aim, exclaims, "What I have long desired shall now be completed." Again the dark foreboding of a terrible future arises at the Nibelungen court. The old gray-haired queen-mother, Ute, still lives, and dreams, just as the preparations are made for departure, that all the birds lie dead on field and heath. Hagen again hesitates ; he would again have dissuaded from the journey, but Gernot scorns him : "Hagen is thinking of Siegfried ; therefore he wants to give up the journey to the land of the Huns."

And here, that you may obtain some impression of the rude and vigorous verse, let me introduce a few lines of the translation of Birch :¹

Then out spoke the bold Hagen : "No wise is it through fear.
If you command it, heroes, then up, gird on your gear ;
I ride with you the foremost into King Etzel's land."
Since then full many a helmet strong was shivered by his hand.

The boats were floating ready, and many men there were.
What clothes of price they had they took and stowed them there.
Was never rest from tolling until the eventide ;
Then they took the flood right gayly and would longer not abide.

¹ Strophe 1453 *et seq.*

Brave tents and towers you saw raised on the grass;
The other side the Rhine-stream that camp it pitched was.
The king to stay awhile was besought of his fair wife;
That night she saw him with her, and never more in her life.

And when the rapid heroes took horse and prickt away,
The women, bent in sorrow, you saw behind them stay;
Of parting all too long their hearts to them did tell, —
When grief so great is coming on the mind forebodes not well.

Then 'gan they shape their journey towards the River Main,
All on through East Franconia, King Gunther and his train;
Hagen, he was their leader; of old he knew the way;
Dankwart did keep, as marshal, their ranks all in good array.

As they from East Franconia the Salfield rode along,
You might have seen them prancing, a bright and lordly throng;
The princes and their vassals, all heroes of great fame.
The twelfth morn brave King Gunther unto the Donau came.

Then rode the grisly Hagen, the foremost of that host;
He was, to the Nibelungen, the guide they loved the most;
The hero keen dismounted, set foot on sandy ground,
His steed unto a tree he tied, looked wistful then all around.

Among those bold companions he was of aspect stern,
And yet of stalwart presence, as one might well discern
From his keen, rapid glances, for the eyes naught rest in him;
Methinks this Nibelungen was of temper most fierce and grim.

Now Hagen is warned by a spirit of the waters:
“Hagen, I will warn thee. Go back while there is
still time. No one of your great army will return
over the Danube.” Hagen now sees that destruc-
tion is certain. They reach at last the territories of
Rüdiger of Bechlarn, who with princely hospitality
receives the whole great army of the Nibelungen
kings, — three thousand vassals and nine thousand
men-at-arms, — and entertains them for almost a
week at Bechlarn. With the German kiss of saluta-

tion Rüdiger's wife and daughter receive the guests, the friends of the master of the house, the brethren and kindred of their queen. In child-like innocence Dietlinde, the daughter, goes down the line of heroes to give the welcome; but when she reaches Hagen she shudders at the grim features, and only upon her father's command holds toward him her cheek. Cheerfulness rules at the table, at which the matron herself presides. There is merry pleasure at the noon-tide when the daughter, with her maids, again appears and inspires the noble Volker of Alzei to playing and jovial songs. The summit of joy is reached when at last the Nibelungen ask Dietlinde for the youngest of their kings, Gieseler, and the betrothal of the beautiful pair takes place amid universal jubilation.

The hour of departure approaches. As a token of intimate alliance and life-long heroic friendship, Rüdiger gives his sword to Gernot, — the faithful weapon which he has wielded in many a battle; then the hero bands march off to the land of the Huns, toward their inevitable fate. When they have crossed the frontiers and encamped for the first time on stranger soil, Hildebrand, the vassal of Dietrich, first learns of their coming, and hurries to announce the same to his master. Dietrich and his troop mount on horseback and go towards the strangers. Hagen recognizes him from afar. "Rise, noble lords and kings," he cries; "there comes a royal train; those are the swift heroes of the Goths, with Dietrich at their head." Then the Nibelungen kings rise before the mighty sovereign

and glorious hero, who now dismounts and comes to meet them. "Welcome, Gunther, Gernot, and Gieseler! Welcome, Hagen and Volker. Do you not know that Kriemhild laments the hero of the Nibelungen-land?" "She may lament him long," replies Hagen, defiantly. "Many years ago he lay dead. Let her hold fast to the king of the Huns, for Siegfried, the long-buried, will return no more." "How Siegfried received his death-wound we will not ask," earnestly replies the king of the Goths; "we will not inquire further; enough that so long as Kriemhild lives, severe misfortune threatens. Hagen, pillar of the Nibelungen, guard thyself before that." And Dietrich says yet more plainly that every morning the wife of Etzel utters lamentations to Heaven over the dead Siegfried. "It is too late to go back," says Volker, the bold and merry gleeman, "let us ride on to Etzel's court, and see what will befall us among the Huns."


The news of the approach of the Burgundian army is brought now to the court of Etzel. Kriemhild and her husband go to the window to see the troop arrive. There, in the distance, appear the well-known Nibelungen escutcheons and eagle-helmets. "He who now will win my favor," cries Kriemhild, "let him think of my grief." The Huns press forward to see one man in the company, — the terrible Hagen, who slew Siegfried. There he rides upon a powerful steed, the gloomy, formidable hero, tall, firm as iron in breast and shoulders, with gray besprent hair, and dark, angry, rapid-glancing eye, overlooking the rest. The main body of the Nibe-

lungen is quartered in the city. The noble vassals go with the three kings to the palace of Etzel. In the press in the inner court Hagen finds Volker, and knowing that the end is close at hand, the two boldest heroes of the Nibelungen conclude a league for life and death. Before one of the palace buildings they sit on a bench of stone, surrounded by Huns, who behold them in respectful silence. Kriemhild too sees her mortal enemy from the window. She breaks forth into angry weeping, and passionately summons her faithful ones to revenge the cruel sorrow which she has suffered from Hagen; sixty men arm themselves to slay Hagen and Volker, and in the front of the troop descends Kriemhild herself—the crown on her head—into the court, to get from Hagen's own mouth the confession of his murder. Volker calls Hagen's attention to the armed troop coming from the stair-case, who replies, flaming out in angry spirit, "Well do I know that all this is for me. But tell me, Volker, will you in the hot battle stand by me in faithful friendship, as I never will abandon thee?" "So long as I live," is Volker's answer, "even though all the hordes of the Huns storm against us, I will not yield from you, O Hagen, one foot." "May the God in Heaven reward you, noble Volker. What more do I need? They may come on with their armed troops." As Kriemhild approaches the pair, Volker rises before her, but Hagen keeps his seat in quiet defiance, that she may not think he fears her. But with this proud scorn of etiquette he combines a second far worse scorn. He lays across his knees, just as

Kriemhild approaches, a gleaming sword, in whose hilt burns a jasper. It is the sword of Siegfried, — Balmung, renowned in legend, — which Kriemhild immediately recognizes. There is the golden belt, the red embroidered sheath, which she has seen so often at Siegfried's side. Close to his feet steps Kriemhild. "Who sent for you here, Lord Hagen, that you dared to ride hither? You know what you have done for me." "Three kings have been invited hither," replies Hagen; "they are my masters; I am their vassal. Where they are, am I also." "You know," continues Kriemhild, "why I hate you. You slew Siegfried, and for that I must weep until death." "Why talk longer," bursts out Hagen. "Yes, I, Hagen, — I slew Siegfried, the hero, because Kriemhild rebuked the beautiful Brunhild. Let him avenge it who will."

Thus was war declared to the death, but it was not to break out at once. The crowd of Huns venture not to attack the champions. The two rise quietly, and go, firm of step, to the king's hall, where their lords are, to protect them in life and death. They forswear sleep, and keep watch before the chamber of the kings. There tower in the darkness the giant figures, silent and almost motionless, before the door. In the night a troop of Huns attempts to surprise the sleepers, but are frightened away by Hagen's fearful voice.

The remainder of the *Nibelungen Lied* is a tale of blood. I must give its outlines for the light it throws on the time and the race. Let it be remembered it is a barbarian minstrel singing to barbarian



hearers. Hitherto Etzel, mindful of the duty of a host, has sought to protect his guests, and persisted in showing toward them the truest friendship. Hagen slays the son, Ortlieb, and the father is aroused. At a banquet the savage mother holds in her arms the little boy, five years old. The higher vassals of Etzel are present; so, too, Hagen and Volker, with the noblest of the Nibelungen. Suddenly a messenger shouts into the hall that the Huns have slain the Nibelungen outside. The princes and vassals start up in wrath, and fall upon the Huns present, in revenge. In the fray Hagen slays the boy Ortlieb in his mother's arms. In the wild battle Kriemhild in anguish cries out to Dietrich to protect her, and the king of the Goths, not prepared for such cruel vengeance, is quickly ready.

He raises his powerful tones to a deep, resounding shout, which rings throughout the whole palace like the blast of a trumpet. For a moment the fray is hushed; Gunther replies they are only concerned with Etzel's vassals, who have slain his followers; the others can withdraw. Etzel, with Kriemhild, Rüdiger, Dietrich and his troop, leave the hall. The strife begins anew, and Etzel's followers are slain together. Now steps Hagen, arrogant through victory, to the door, and scorns the gray Etzel for withdrawing from the battle. He mocks Kriemhild, and Volker joins in the grim defiance: "Such poor cowards as the Huns have never been seen." Kriemhild commands that Etzel's shield shall be filled with gold, and given to whomsoever shall slay Hagen and bring his head to her. The Huns, how-

ever, strive in vain. Evening descends on the awful combat, and stillness follows the wild tumult. The tired heroes in the hall lay away their shields and unbind their helms. Only Hagen and Volker remain armed to defend their lords. In the deep exhaustion of the hot and murderous combat, and in the certainty of perishing, a short death seems to them preferable to a long struggle. They desire a parley, and ask to go into the free air, so that, assaulted by all the hostile troops, they may find a speedy death.

But Kriemhild fears an escape, and denies the request. Then love for his young life speaks out of Gieseler: "Ah, fair sister, how could I have expected to see this great calamity when you invited me here from the Rhine? How have I deserved death here in a foreign land? Faithful was I always to thee, and never did thee harm. I hoped to find thee loving to me; let me die quickly, if it must be so." Kriemhild is much moved, and demands to have only Hagen given up. "I will let you live, for you are my brothers; we are children of one mother." "Let us die with Hagen, since die we must," cries Gieseler too. "He is our vassal; we will be faithful to him unto death."

The rage of the wretched Kriemhild rises to a terrible height. She causes the hall to be set on fire. Soon the waves of flame rise far into the night; smoke and heat, and the brands falling from the roof into the hall, torment the confined heroes almost to death. They press close to the walls, and cover themselves with their shields against the heat.

They quench their thirst in the blood of their slain foes. The night is at length over, and amid the smoking ruins, in the pale day-break, stand the firm combatants, with spirit unbroken. Then at last Etzel turns to the noble Rüdiger of Bechlarn; he unwittingly has brought all this evil upon the land. He advised and arranged the marriage with Kriemhild; he guided thither the Nibelungen. After showing them hospitality, the young King Gieseler is to become his son. If he refuses now to perform the service for Etzel, he is wanting in fidelity to his king. If he yields, he commits treason towards those whom he led hither as guests and comrades. So comes the bitter struggle of a soul whose only choice is between the kinds of unfaithfulness. We see a strong, trusting heart tremble in despairing anguish. It breaks long before it receives the death-thrust. It is the older faith—that to his king—which he feels forced to keep. His retainers arm, and he stalks, shield in hand, to the ruins of the hall. Those who have lately been his guests remind him of his honor; but the more ancient duty must carry it over the newer. The Burgundians know it too, so they forfeit faith toward him lately their host, to keep it toward their vassal. But one last and touching sign of the friendship now dissolved is given. Hagen complains that his shield is broken; Rüdiger reaches to him his own shield, and stands before those whom he must fight, unprotected. “Grim as Hagen was,” sings the minstrel, “this act touched his heart. He wept, and the knights wept with him. ‘May God in Heaven reward you,

noble Rüdiger, your like is not upon the earth.'” Hagen refuses to fight, and withdraws with his shadow, Volker, and Gieseler. The others remain, and the strife begins; poor Gernot hurries to help his men; Rüdiger strikes a death-wound upon his head, and the last blow which Gernot aims with the sword given him by Rüdiger is Rüdiger’s death-blow. The heroes sink together.

Palace and towers resound with the mourning over the heroes who have fallen, so that Dietrich of Berne, standing aloof as one that had no part in the quarrel, sends a messenger to learn the cause of the cries. Finding that Rüdiger, whom they have loved, is dead, Hildebrand demands his body for burial. Scorn is the answer of the Nibelungen; Dietrich’s giant followers hereupon grasp their swords, and anew the combat rages. Volker, the merry gleeman, falls by the mighty hand of Hildebrand. Gieseler and a Gothic prince are mutually slain; and Hagen, to revenge Volker’s death, presses upon Hildebrand with blows so terrible that the rushing can be heard far away of the mighty strokes of Balmung, the sword of Siegfried, about the head of the grisly Goth. Hildebrand, however, escapes with a heavy wound; he returns to Dietrich, but none of his followers. In the royal hall, solitary too, among the bodies of friend and foe, stand Gunther and Hagen. Then at length goes forth Dietrich; Gunther and Hagen wait gloomily, and when summoned to yield, Hagen refuses to do so until the sword of the Nibelungen is broken. Dietrich overpowers Hagen, with lion clasp binds him,

and leads him to Kriemhild. Gunther is also bound. Dietrich recommends that their lives be spared, and departs in gloom. But Kriemhild must drain to the dregs the cup of revenge. If Hagen will give her back the Nibelungen treasure, he shall keep his life. But Hagen is still defiant: "So long as one of my lords lives, I will not reveal the treasure." Gunther is promptly slain, and his head brought by the fury to Hagen. "It is now ended," he cries. "Now is dead the noble Nibelungen king, as also the young Gieseler and Gernot. No one knows now the place of the treasure but God and I alone. From thee, cruel woman, it shall be forever hidden." "So, then," cries Kriemhild, "I have only the sword of my Siegfried." She draws it from its sheath, and Balmung at length avenges the murder in the hand of the furious queen of the Huns. Then springs up the old Hildebrand in wrath, because the peace which his lord asked for Gunther and Hagen was broken. Kriemhild sinks before his blow, with a shriek, and all is done. "With sorrow," so ends the song, "was concluded the high festival of the king; as always joy gives sorrow at the end." The last stanza runs:

I cannot tell you farther about the slaughters red;
The hosts that then were smitten in silence all lay dead.
What afterwards befell, herein ye may not read;
Here has the song an ending; this is the Nibelungen Lied.

CHAPTER III.

THE NIBELUNGEN LIED—Continued.

In the preceding chapter the story of the Nibelungen Lied was told, after a brief account of what the poem was, and why it is worthy of attention from a generation like ours, removed eight hundred years from the time of its composition. I hope some traits of beauty and grandeur have made themselves plain, rude though it sometimes is. Here, at any rate, are the judgments of certain writers whose opinions deserve to be weighed: "From whatever side we view it," says Kurz,¹ "it is by far the most important work which the Middle Ages have given to us. We may dare, in proud confidence, to set it beside the best which has founded the glory of other races." "It is," says Carlyle,² "by far the finest monument of old German art. A noble soul the singer must have been; he has a clear eye for the beautiful and true; the whole spirit of chivalry, of love, and of heroic valor must have lived in him and inspired him. Everywhere he shows a noble sensibility; the sad accents of parting friends, the lamentings of women, the high daring of men,—all that

¹ Geschichte der deutschen Literatur.

² The Nibelungen Lied.

is worthy and lovely prolongs itself in melodious echoes through his heart. A true old singer, and taught of nature herself." "Whoever," says Ludwig Baur,¹ "desires with poetical look to transport himself into primeval Germany must not only read, but study, the Iliad of the Germans,—The Nibelungen Lied. There the original spirit of the people breathes purest; there it becomes plain how formerly the world and the intricacy of human fate were regarded." But no tribute is so picturesque as that of Heinrich Heine: "Would you nice little people form an idea of the Nibelungen Lied, and the gigantic passions which move in it? Imagine to yourselves a clear summer night, the stars pale as silver, but large as suns, stepping forth in the blue sky, and that all the Gothic cathedrals of Europe had given one another a rendezvous upon a wide mountain plain. There would come striding on the Strassburg minster, the Kölner-Dom, the Campanile of Giotto, the cathedral of Rouen, and these would pay to the beautiful Notre Dame of Paris, very courteously, their obeisance. True, their walk would be a little clumsy; some among them would be slightly awkward, and one might often laugh at their infatuated waggling. But this would have an end when one should see how they would fall into a rage, slay one another, as Notre Dame de Paris raises her strong arms to Heaven, suddenly seizes a sword, and strikes the head from the greatest of all the cathedrals. But, no. So, you get no idea of the figures of the

¹ Quoted by Schönhuth.

Nibelungen Lied. No tower is so high, and no stone so hard, as the grim Hagen and the revengeful Kriemhild.''¹

That the testimony is not all of this kind is true ; and as an offset to the opinions just given, here is that of Frederick the Great, which has been framed, and is now kept under glass in the library at Zürich : “ You have much too high an opinion of it. To my notion, it is not worth a charge of powder. I would not tolerate it in my library, but would sweep it out.” There is a rare charm in the antique phrase in which the poem is given, as there is in the language of Chaucer. It is like the broken talk of childhood, and through it the conceptions come to the reader with a sweet and simple artlessness.

To give more particularly the account of the origin of the Nibelungen Lied, about one hundred and fifty years ago the Swiss Bodmer discovered in the castle of Hohenems, in Switzerland, two bulky manuscripts, agreeing in most respects, and giving the text of something long forgotten. The poem had no title, and for want of a better one, the words were used found at the end of the closing stanza, — “ This is the Nibelungen Lied.” In spite of Frederick the Great’s disparaging criticism, it found readers, and more admired than condemned. Straightway came questions : Who wrote it ? Is it possible to separate in it the historical and fabulous ? and many more. It has been made the subject of that microscopic scrutiny which only Ger-

¹ Quoted in the Bibliothek der deutschen Klassiker.

mans seem to have patience and strength to bestow. Of the labors of the too patient scholars, and the fierce controversies in which they have engaged among themselves, I propose to make no note. Karl Lachmann was the acute and persistent critic who led the way, and a small army of disciples came after to elaborate the work of their chief. Holtzmann was the first who dared to question their conclusions; and he too gained a considerable following. The clash of their fencing resounds still in the philological *Jahrbücher* and *Zeitschriften*. Taking as guides Dr. Hermann Fischer, who in 1874 wrote out an account of Nibelungen studies, and the poet Simrock, let the following be stated as to the poem's origin:

Every rude race has its singers, who invent lays relating to the experiences of their nation and their mythological beliefs, handing them down to succeeding generations by oral tradition. Of such minstrels, as has already been mentioned, the Germans had an abundance, who sang with vigorous imaginations of the wild deities, of the heroes partly human and partly divine, of the wanderings and fightings of the race as it poured out of Asia into Europe, sweeping restlessly to and fro until it found stability. When at length dying Rome gave to the Teutons her sceptre, her civilization, and her faith, what had been oral tradition was intrusted to writing. Now, however, the monks were at work. It was a hard task to wean the barbarians from the faith and life of their fathers; the ties by which, more than anything else, they were bound to this

old faith and life were these traditions. For several hundred years, while the Teutonic tribes were gradually passing under the power of the cross, the persistent effort of the Church to throw into oblivion the traditions of the past continued. This effort of the Church has already been noted, and also that Karl the Great loved well the songs of his fathers ; he would fain have preserved them ; but for the most part they perished. Now and then appeared a churchman in whom zeal for the new order had not quite supplanted the old Gothic impulses. Going from Regensburg to Vienna, the traveller takes the steamer, for the trip down the Danube, at Passau. One will be likely to remember the little city, lying quiet just where the blue stream becomes comfortably navigable for the craft of to-day, and the black crag rising steeply on the opposing bank, whose weather-beaten brow is surmounted by the bishop's castle. It frowns from the summit there to-day as it has done for a thousand years. Here, just nine hundred years ago, lived Bishop Pilgrim, who one day told his secretary, Konrad, to make a book out of lays he had heard the minstrels sing. Konrad faithfully executed the command. Coming from the primeval times, as young minstrels learned them from the lips of gray-beards, to sing them in their turn, each put into his version something of himself and of the time in which he lived, until, in the many elaborations, the lays had become enriched from the life and spirit of all the generations they had touched. The lays, in part, were more ancient than the first swarming of that primeval

Aryan hive. It is believed that Konrad was the first to commit the mass of tradition to writing, probably in Latin, probably in prose ; not a syllable of his work has come down to us. In times that followed, Konrad's book was rewrought by others, again and again, until at length we reach the year 1200. Europe was aflame with the spirit of the crusades, and the hosts then, as they swept eastward in all the splendor of steel armor and knightly pennons, trailed past the city of Passau, as the current bore them swiftly on. It was sometimes a halting-place, and, for the entertainment of the knights, the minstrels poured in to sing at the banquets and in the intervals of the tournaments. Then it was that some bard, whose home perhaps was Kürenberg,¹ a little farther down the stream, a knight himself, though with a soul that brought him into sympathy with the people, for the last time worked over the ancient lay. It is conjectured that one of the manuscripts found a hundred and fifty years ago at Hohenems is the veritable work of the Kürenberger, prepared that he might recite it to the crusading guests of the hospitable bishop of Passau. Whoever the poet may have been, he gave to his elaboration some superficial traits of the age of chivalry ; the Nibelungen and their kings are nominally Christian, and there is much talk of tournaments and other mediæval usages. But the spirit of an era more ancient than the introduction of Christianity is well preserved.

¹ Fischer.

The faith and the chivalry are mere drapery upon figures that belong to the primeval heathendom. All the motives of the characters are Pagan; Christianity does not affect events or persons.¹ The heathenism may be yielding, but Christianity nowhere as yet takes hold; it is almost entirely confined to outer religious observances. A foundation principle of the personages is the duty of revenge; it comes as a necessary sequel of fidelity, and is no less honored than fidelity.

At first the Nibelungen Lied was popular. Besides the manuscripts of Hohenems, more than fifty others have been discovered, in a more or less fragmentary condition, and allusions to the poem in writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are not uncommon. Gradually, however, interest in it declined; in the fifteenth century it had dropped from the knowledge of the world. At length, in the eighteenth, it was again read with admiration, harsh Frederick sneering at the folly that was superseding the wise forgetfulness of the fathers. In the nineteenth the admiration for it has become perhaps excessive. It should be to the Germans,² it is said, all that Homer was to the Greeks; but Homer, by the Greeks, was revered as a Bible.

What precisely is the picture of primeval Germany which the Nibelungen Lied gives us? Historical are the three Burgundian kings, Gunther, Gernot, and Gieseler; historical is Etzel, or Attila,

¹ Göthe.

² F. H. Schönhuth.

and the annihilation, through him, of the Burgundian royal house; historical is Dietrich, the great Theodoric, the Ostrogoth. It is not, however, in this way that the poem has a value, as a source from which is to be derived knowledge of particular incidents and individuals. Events are moved forward or backward in time at the pleasure of the poet; personages made contemporary who really were separated by many hundred years; things purely mythical combined with facts. The Dietrich of the poem is hardly the Theodoric of history; and Etzel, certainly—the quiet, hospitable prince, advanced in years—is far different from the terrible “Scourge of God” of the fifth century, a figure as tremendous in the world’s annals as he is in the great picture of Kaulbach at Berlin, the “Battle of the Huns,” where he towers in the air, scourge in hand, lifted upon a shield borne on the shoulders of his Huns, a sublime embodiment of savage fury. The service which the poem renders history is of a far different kind from this. It lies in the faithful representation of the disposition and character of the race.¹ These can be learned not only more picturesquely, but more exactly and surely, than in formal history. Hector and Achilles, Agamemnon and Æneas may be mere names, inventions of the poet, not portraitures of men; but we are, nevertheless, sure that we have in Homer a revelation of primeval Greece,—its faith, life, and spirit; so, through the Nibelungen Lied, as through a window, we behold

¹ Vilmar.

the Teutons just emerging from the shadows of pre-historic night. Lovingly do the Germans dwell upon the interesting picture. If there is anything in it to excite pride, in that we are entitled to share, brethren as we are of the Teutonic household.

The features of the ancient external civilization are here made visible. We see the fondness for gold, jewels, and rich apparel, the joy in hunting, the passion for minstrelsy and pageants. We see the superstitions by which the forefathers were mastered, — superstitions often which hold the race to-day. Kriemhild dreams of her falcon struck dead by the eagle, of Siegfried crushed by mountains; her mother dreams that the birds are all dead on field and plain. Straightway they are interpreted as forebodings of woe. At the near foot-fall of the murderer the blood flows afresh in the wounds of his victim. We see here too the German respect for woman, — a fine confirmation of the report of Tacitus. Siegfried, Rüdiger, Gunther, Etzel, are all husbands of one wife, who sits honored in the home, presides at the banquet, and welcomes the guest with a chaste kiss of salutation. In narrating the most valorous deeds of the heroes, the poet, instead of giving their own names, often designates them by their wives, as if to lift them into higher honor. Not Siegfried, but Kriemhild's husband, it is who thunders victoriously upon a fugitive army; not Rüdiger, but Götlinde's spouse, goes serenely toward his death. In the fore-front of life stands the woman, no less vigorous than tender, a mark for deep respect, as well as affectionate caress. What

vitality is theirs! Ten years after her marriage Kriemhild is widowed, and thirteen years after that her charms gain her a new husband. Six years later still she bears to Etzel the child Ortlieb, and when at length she, her brethren, and race have perished, her mother, the old Queen Ute, still hale and strong, in the monastery at Lorsch survives to lament them all.

The vitality and prominence are, in fact, sometimes alarming. Here is an account of a sorrowful experience of King Gunther, on his wedding-night at the hands of his wife, Brunhild, translated, as precisely as I can give it, from the old text of the year 1200 :

Then when to meet his darling the gallant king did haste,
She unclasped the band she wore 'round her waist.
It was a beauteous girdle, and thereto strong and tough;
With that unto her spouse, the king, she caused sorrow enough.

She bound him hand and foot so the knots could not fail;
Unto the wall she took him and hung him on a nail.
If he talked while she slept, she made him hold his breath;
From her strength I ween that he almost caught his death.

She did not ask him how he was while she in quiet lay;
There he had to hang until the dawn of day—
Until through the window the morning threw its streak;
What strength he had had vanished, and he felt tired and weak.

"Ah, well a day," he cried; "if I should lose my life,
Only think of the example! I fear that every wife
In all future time, that else might be meek,
To rule her patient husband will disastrously seek."¹

Far grander, far more important than the picture

¹ Strophe 587 *et seq.*

of outward traits, is the portrayal in the *Nibelungen Lied* of the old Teutonic soul. What did they love as the bright qualities of manhood? We can know from the conceptions the poets drew to stand for the highest heroes and heroines; and what they set before themselves as ideals we may be sure they made real in some part in their own lives. Rich, beneficent liberality, so long as it has anything to give, is the quality of the lords; gratitude, which goes out only with life itself, is the quality of the man, his retainer; for we may see in the poem the close bond between vassal and chief, the institution which had its birth in the German woods, and, becoming connected with things less noble, grew up at length into the feudal system. Finer than the generosity — finer even than the gratitude — is the superb fidelity. For the dear king and suzerain is everything done, — faithful fighting, the free outpouring of blood, and, at last, of life; and on the other hand, not even in death do kings abandon the faithful servant, but hold fast even to the fearful perishing of themselves and their whole race. “This fidelity is the peculiar life-element of the German people, and the real throbbing heart of our epic.”¹

Taking now the four leading characters of the poem, — Siegfried, Kriemhild, Hagen, and Rüdiger, — let us see if a somewhat closer examination will bear out the claims. As to Siegfried,² we are to notice that contrasting qualities are thoroughly

¹ Vilmar.

² Kurz.

harmonized in him. Nothing can surpass his tenderness at times ; at times he is the lion in spirit and courage. The modesty of a maiden is now not more marked than his ; again, upon occasion, he shows a proud self-consciousness, which, however, we do not blame him for entertaining, and the expression of which appears to be only a finer frankness. He ventures not to woo the beautiful Kriemhild, even when, by the conquest of the Saxons, he seems to have preserved the Burgundians from destruction ; for when he sees her “ who walks like the morning redness out from troubled clouds, who shines before other women as the still moon moves before the stars,” he is struck with fear. “ How could I have thought to love thee ! It is a vain illusion ; death would be better.” He remains near her for twelve days ; and even though it is plain that his love is returned, he ventures not to hope, and is on the point of departing in sorrow to his own home down the Rhine, when Gernot draws him back. He seems to himself not yet worthy of the peerless princess, and not until he has done for King Gunther still another great service — the vanquishing of Brunhild in the contests at Isenstein — does he dare ask for Kriemhild’s hand. His affection from now onward becomes different, but not less warm or true. Even in his death-hour it is revealed as the passion of his soul. “ Then spoke, in his woe, the hero wounded to death, to Gunther : ‘ If, O King, you ever mean in this world to be true to any one, I commend to your mercy my dear wife. Let it be fortunate for her that she is your

sister. With the virtue becoming a prince, stand faithfully by her. Never before to woman has such sorrow come.''' He is full of trusting honor. Not alone toward his wife, but in other relations, does Siegfried show himself noble. Always gentle, generous, just, and forgiving, the hero is almost without spot. Possibly, in lending himself to Gunther's plans and employing the stratagems by which Brunhild is overcome, a want of openness may be seen which is inconsistent with the highest conception. It is, however, but a momentary stooping to deceit. He is for the most part thoroughly true to others, and expects—to his sorrow—that others will be as true to him.

With Siegfried we part in the middle of the poem, leaving him dead in his adorned coffin in the cathedral at Worms. Kriemhild,¹ however, is the persistent figure of the lay. A simple maiden, in the shelter of the palace, she tells in the first few stanzas of the poem, to her mother, her dream of the slain falcon. When, at last, a woman stricken in years, she falls at length beneath the sweep of the sword of Hildebrand, it is the culmination and close. She is very picturesque, the fierce heathenism of the elder time breaking out in the characterization in a way that is very striking. At first, a bashful maiden, she cannot think of a husband; but when Siegfried appears at Worms, and his praise resounds everywhere, a premonition fills her soul of the love that is to come. As soon as she has become his

¹ Kurz.

wife the shyness of the virgin vanishes ; she steps forth among women with a matron's dignity, all whose thoughts and feelings are centred in her husband. He is to her the sum of all excellence, to whom nothing is comparable. At the detraction of Brunhild she falls into an excessive rage, which our sympathy does not follow, and the quarrel results whose sequel is to be so sad for her. It is an excess of wifely love ; and it is an excess too which makes her happiness to conclude with the death of Siegfried ; for during the many years that follow, sorrow alone it is which colors her life, bound up as she is in the recollection of her lost love. Thus far in Kriemhild we have a picture of the loveliest maidenhood and womanhood, only defective in that wifely devotion is made to go too far. The portrait is unique in German mediæval literature, yet it could have been drawn by no one but a Teutonic poet, and the hearts of all of Teuton stock go forth towards it. It can stand with the most beautiful pictures of all times and races.

But what shall be said of the Kriemhild that follows ? With maidenhood and wifehood behind her, she broods in widow's weeds over her sorrow. The imperishable affection which inspires her gives birth to a heathenish outcome, which the minstrel, filled with no faith but that of the primeval forests, develops, apparently without a thought of disapproval, until Kriemhild blazes luridly forth in the character of a fury. Her soul becomes filled with the desire for revenge. It is Hagen who has slain Siegfried, and he must expiate the crime. Terrible

as Kriemhild appears in the closing scenes, demanding new thousands for slaughter, and at length bathing her hands in her brother's blood, she does not lose our sympathy entirely. Really, the fury of the end is not inconsistent with the timid maid who looks from her retired window, in the early scenes, upon Siegfried prancing with his retinue in the plain; her revengefulness is, so to speak, but a phase of her fidelity, — a distortion of her undying love, which by circumstances is led into excesses not planned before. She carries the revenge to a terrible extreme, but the poet has given a most reasonable account of it, developing the dreadful issue, not merely from Kriemhild's character, but also from the connection of events.¹ It is Hagen only whom she seeks to reach; but the Nibelungen have gone into the land of the Huns bound together as one man; if he dies, the kings and nobles of Burgundy must die with him. She can only reach her end, so fixed is the reciprocal fealty between lord and dependent, by the destruction of all. Recall how it is that Kriemhild, step by step, is pushed into the horrors. She invites the Nibelungen to Etzel's court with deceitful cordiality, to be sure; but to avenge Siegfried in some way is, in her unregenerate soul, a paramount duty. She contemplates no wholesale murder, but only the punishment of Hagen. He, by his insulting bearing, enrages her still more, and at length makes her desperate. The deaths of Gunther and Hagen are, as

¹ Kurz.

it were, forced upon her, through Hagen's defiant scorn. Terrible is the picture which the poet, with unsparing hand, draws, — fit for unconverted barbarians. Husband gone, child killed, Etzel's knight-hood all lying slain, Kriemhild seems forced by an irresistible power to annihilate him who has robbed her of everything. Great though the gulf is, it has been finely said,¹ which is opened between the tender maid, palpitating with first love, and the murderous fury, yet it is perfectly intelligible. We feel it is the same power of love which at first leads her to the breast of Siegfried, and at last raises her arm for the stroke that kills her brother.

Still more picturesque than in Kriemhild is the mingling of dark and light in the grim Hagen. The retainer of Gunther, to whom he is unswervingly faithful in sorrow and joy, performing in his behalf deeds of the blackest treachery and murder, deeds of the noblest sacrifice and most unshrinking courage, he is a truly appalling blending of the angel and the devil. He appears first as the man of wide experience, who, when the Burgundians are trying to make out Siegfried, approaching suddenly with his shining Nibelungen, must be called in to tell who they are. When, at length, Kriemhild and Brunhild have fiercely quarreled, it is Hagen who, in savage fidelity, becomes the instrument of revenge to the wife of his lord. Perhaps a twinge of jealousy comes in to influence him, since Siegfried has so far surpassed him in exploits ; but his motive is,

¹ Kurz.

in the main, to do the will of those to whom he is bound. By blackest treachery he wins from Kriemhild the revelation as to Siegfried's vulnerability between the shoulders, where the linden leaf fell as he was bathing in the dragon's blood. Most foully he uses his knowledge, casting the murderous javelin when Siegfried, unsuspecting, stoops to drink at the spring. When Siegfried, in his death-agony, by his appeals melts the confederates of Hagen, the dark-faced ruffian, whose eyes are described as always darting rapid glances, stands unmoved, replying with exulting insolence to the upbraidings of his victim. In the same spirit he orders that the corpse shall be borne to be placed at Kriemhild's door, at Worms; and his self-centred coolness is not affected when, before the whole world, as he steps to the side of the body, the wounds bleed afresh in the murderer's presence. This is all the harshest savagery, and so too his subsequent treatment of Kriemhild, whom he always cruelly thwarts, taking from her the Nibelungen treasure to hurl it in the Rhine, and at length opposing her nuptials with Etzel.

When at last Kriemhild, seeking revenge, invites the Burgundians to Etzel's court, the wary Hagen penetrates her purpose and holds back. When, however, the journey is resolved upon, he follows resolutely the lead of his masters. The supernatural prophetess makes known to him his own fate, and that of the entire host. He cannot change the purpose of his lords; no more can he abandon them, — for is not fidelity entwined with his very life? Grimly he moves through the festivities and

pageants which precede the final slaughters. Recoiling before his swarthy, tempestuous countenance, the lovely Dietlinde, when, at her father's (Rüdiger's) bidding, she gives the kiss of welcome to his guests, starts back in alarm. He rides unsmiling amid the welcoming multitudes, and at length, side by side with Volker, sits before Etzel's court, beheld at length by Kriemhild. Touching is the bond of friendship which the doomed servitor enters into with the minstrel Volker; cruel, and yet most lion-like is his bearing—the sublimity of hardihood—when, before Kriemhild's troop, he coolly lays across his knees Balmung, the sword of Siegfried, and glories in his murder. “Who sent for you here, Lord Hagen, that you dared to ride hither? You know what you have done for me.” “No one has sent for me,” replies Hagen. “Three kings have been invited hither; they are my masters, I am their vassal. Where they are, am I also.” “You know,” continues Kriemhild, “why I hate you. You slew Siegfried, and for that I must weep until death.” “Why talk longer,” bursts out Hagen. “Yes, I, Hagen,—I slew Siegfried, the hero, because Kriemhild rebuked the beautiful Brunhild. Let him avenge it who will.”

In the fearful scenes that follow, Hagen towers merciless, gigantic as another Thor, yet with a heart full of friendship, and toward Rüdiger at length he shows affecting gratitude. The tie that binds him to Gunther, Gernot, and Gieseler is of adamant, which cannot be broken; and just as true on their side are the kings to their vassal. Truly piteous is

the outcry of the young Gieseler to Kriemhild: "Ah, fair sister, how could I have believed to see this great calamity when you invited me here from the Rhine? How have I deserved death in a foreign land? Faithful was I always to thee, and never did thee harm. I hoped to find thee loving to me; let me die quickly, if it must be so." Kriemhild demands to have only Hagen given up. "I will let you live, for you are my brothers; we are children of one mother." "Let us die with Hagen, since die we must," cries Gieseler. "Let us die with Hagen, even were there a thousand of us of one stock," says Gernot. They will be faithful to him until death. Forward they go, smiting and smitten, falling one by one, friend and foe heaped in the carnage, until at length Hagen,—last of the race,—in bonds and wounded to death, confronts Kriemhild alone. If Hagen will restore to her the treasure of the Nibelungen, given to her by Siegfried, long ago thrown by him into the Rhine, even now he may live. "Now is dead," cries Hagen, "the noble Burgundian king, as also the young Gieseler and Gernot. No one knows now the place of the treasure but God and I alone. From thee it shall be forever hidden." With these words he bows beneath the stroke, and the fierce life goes out. The ideal of a savage hero! A figure fascinating through all its repulsiveness! Such cruelty, such unscrupulousness, such manful virtue!

But to my mind the glory of the Nibelungen Lied is the grand story of the Margrave Rüdiger, noblest of the heroes. There is not a point of the charac-

terization here that does not excite admiration. He appears at first as the messenger sent by Etzel to win the hand of Kriemhild. He departs in state from Bechlarn, his castle, proceeds to Worms, and with all the forms of knightly ceremony demands the princess for his master. When at length the suit is successful, and Kriemhild leaves the Rhine, on her way to the distant land of the Huns, Rüdiger receives her on the frontier with the finest hospitality. His wife, Götlinde, shows her all possible respect, and together they speed her on her way. Still finer, however, is the hospitality shown when at length the Nibelungen, their kings at their head, pass through the land to visit Kriemhild. Rüdiger receives the thousands of them, and the days pass with music and feasting. The incidents are most attractive when Götlinde and Dietlinde, the wife and daughter of Rüdiger, salute with a chaste kiss the princes, and when the beautiful daughter recoils with fear before the sinister look of Hagen. In sign of friendship, Rüdiger gives Gernot his sword; and becomes still further bound to his guests when at length Gieseler and Dietlinde love one another, and are betrothed. In company with the strangers from the Rhine, at length he goes down the Danube. The meeting with Kriemhild takes place, and presently begin the horrors. Rüdiger holds aloof until at length, commanded by his lord, he is forced to stand forth. The struggle in his noble spirit between his duty toward his sovereign and his obligation toward those who have been his guests and become his close friends is most pathetic. It is hard to conceive of a situation more tragically pictu-

resque; he is rent asunder, as it were, by two angels. Here at length is the account of his end, in a translation, in which I have striven to give the rugged, irregular movement as well as the simple pathos of the original lines:

"Ah, woe is me! that I must live to see this day.
All my cherished honor I must put away;
All the truth and faith which God commanded me.
O, would to Heaven that I through death this trouble now might
flee."

Then spoke to the king the hero true and bold:
"Take back, O Lord Etzel, what I from you hold;
My land and my castles, I give them back to thee,
And empty-handed now will I go forth into misery.

"The Nibelungen strangers, how can I them molest?
Within my castle walls I have welcomed each as guest.
Together at the board we have broken bread;
Gifts I have bestowed, — am I now to strike them dead?"

Kriemhild and Etzel, however, are inexorable. Rüdiger resolves to go forth, sure of finding death. He gives a last charge to his suzerain:

"To thee must revert my castles and my land;
I shall fall to-day by some Nibelungen hand.
My wife and my child I now commit to thee,
And all my poor retainers, who then must homeless be."

He arms and goes forth, with five hundred followers. The Nibelungen think at first he is coming to their assistance; when he undeceives them, they sorrowfully upbraid him.

"I would to God," said Rüdiger, "O heroes, that ye were
Back by the Rhine's fair river, and I lay lifeless here.
So might I save mine honor, which now I must resign;
Ne'er yet from friends has hero caught such sorrow and shame as
mine."

Sorrowfully and affectionately the Nibelungen deprecate the contest, but Rüdiger is unbending. When at length Hagen complains that his shield is broken, the margrave says :

"Take mine, take mine, O Hagen, and carry it in your hand;
Would that thou mightest bear it home to the Nibelungen land!"
When he his shield thus willingly to Hagen offered had,
The eyes of many standing by with weeping became red.

Though grim the ruthless Hagen, his heart though hard and stern,
Yet, as he took the shield, his heart with pity and love did burn.
"Now God reward you, most noble Rüdiger!
On earth your equal can be found nowhere.
Heaven pity us, that now our swords 'gainst friends we take!"
Then spoke the margrave, bent with grief: "For that my heart
doth break."

Hagen refuses to fight, and retires. Rüdiger overcomes many Nibelungen; at length Gernot comes forward, with the sword he had received as a gift from Rüdiger, at Bechlarn.

Sharp cut the swords; no ward against them could avail.
On Gernot's helmet fell the blows of Rüdiger like hail;
At last 'twas beaten in, although 'twas hard as stone.
For the mortal wound of Gernot the margrave must atone.

Though struck he was with death, high swung he Rüdiger's gift;
He smote the margrave's helmet-bands with strokes heavy and swift.
He smote him unto death through his armor fast;
Both heroes fell, and breathed out their lives at last.

Hospitable, generous, brave, pitying, faithful unto death,— what quality in the heroic catalogue do we here miss? We can hardly find fault with the en-

¹ Strophe 2090 *et seq.*

thusiastic declaration of the poet, — who, more deeply perhaps than any man of our day, has penetrated into the spirit of this old literature, — that the death of Rüdiger is the most touching episode to be found in heroic poetry.¹

There are so many points of resemblance between the Nibelungen Lied and the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer that it is almost impossible to speak of the former without making some comparison between them. As the Homeric poetry is amber, secreted in the morning of the world from a magnificent stock which long since was hewn down and has perished, — precious amber, in which has been embalmed for us and for immortality the quintessential quality of the vanished Hellenic soul, — so is the Nibelungen Lied an exudation from the spirit of the primeval Teutons, wildly fragrant even yet, from their barbarian wanderings in the wintry, unsunned forests of prehistoric time. As to the origin of the poems, the same controversies have prevailed. Shall we say that one bard was the writer in each case ; or is each pieced work, the lays of many poets combined into one whole ; and if this is true, what shall we say of the piecer ? Was his work an inartistic setting together of the fragments that came to his hand ; or were they matched and blended with taste, — heated and hammered over anew by a great genius, — as he shaped them into an exquisite masterpiece ? The probable answer to these questions in the case of the Teutonic epic has been given ; a sim-

¹ Karl Simrock.

ilar answer best satisfies many modern scholars in the case of Homer. Can the Nibelungen Lied ever be considered such a treasure as the Iliad and Odyssey? Probably not. The best German authorities, with all their enthusiasm, do not venture to claim that. It does not give in its manifoldness the human character, as do the Homeric poems. Siegfried and Hagen can never replace Achilles and Hector.¹ In outer completeness it must stand behind the Iliad. In the great general plan a comparison is possible, but in perfection of execution the Greek is superior.² In one point, however,—and it is an important one,—I believe we may claim for the Nibelungen Lied an incontestible superiority to Homer,—depth of moral sensibility. It may be described as, throughout, a portrayal of one form or another of faithfulness to duty. The spring of Hagen's career, from first to last, is fealty to his king and queen, whether he murders and betrays, or protects at the cost of his own life. Fidelity of another kind is, throughout, the motive of Kriemhild,—distorted at length into a strange frenzy of devotion, in which she sacrifices her brothers, her husband's entire knighthood, and her own race. It is fidelity again that makes the nobleness of Rüdiger; it is the struggle between two forms of it which makes the crisis in his career,—tearing his heart asunder, so that with one hand he deals a blow, while with the other he gives a shield by which it

¹ Gervinus.

² Simrock.

may be warded off, in a sublimity of distraction. Search Homer as we may, and we can find nothing to match these pictures. The scene is a fine one when the raging Diomedes meets with hostile purpose the champion Glaucus, and the two, mindful of the ancient guest-right in which their fathers have stood, forbear their fighting, — to exchange arms and plight new friendship.¹ Andromache laments, amiably, the long-lost Hector;² Penelope can be constant through twenty years, and the pious Telemachus wanders in search of his long-lost father. These are passages of great tenderness; but how faint in comparison with the passionate devotedness upon which, as upon a thread red with German heart's blood, the strophes of the *Nibelungen Lied* throughout are strung.³ The German epic has, plainly, its inferiorities; but it has, too, this superiority. Great in its day was the Hellenic race, — in hand and heart, in thought, in art, and in arms; until at length it was smitten by the Roman mace, and, becoming defiled with base intermixture, went sadly to ruin. The promise of all this greatness shines in the poems which came from it in its morning. So too in Siegfried and Rüdiger — yes, in Kriemhild and Hagen — we may read a promise of Teutonic mastery.

Among the most impressive of modern paintings is one by Delaroche, in which two figures, typifying respectively the ancient Hellenic spirit and the spirit

¹ *Iliad*, vi.

² *Iliad*, xxii.

³ Vilmar.

of mediæval times, when the Teutons were coming to be leaders, are represented as sitting side by side. The type of Greece is a superbly beautiful woman, whose features are of absolutely faultless regularity, whose drapery falls in perfectly classic folds. The face, however, is cold ; the calm eyes down-turned, without a trace of inspiration. The companion figure is less beautiful ; the face is of the German type ; the hair streams back disordered ; the folds of the robe are less statuesque ; but the countenance is turned upward, and warm with soul. From the eyes an aspiration leaps forth toward the heavens ; the brow is anxious, as if it felt the weight of obligation which could not be fully discharged ; the lips burst open from within by the struggling forth of some heart-birth of rhapsody. In some such contrast, to my mind, stand Homer and the Nibelungen Lied.

No American capable of the finer impressions can set foot, for the first time, on the soil of Europe without a thrill. In our land we have no past behind us ; our surroundings are all of the present, and suggest nothing beyond yesterday. In the Old World a solemn perspective of ages lies, as it were, behind all that we see. Each stream, each mount, each weather-scarred town and tower, has a hundred great associations of history that touch a sensitive spirit beyond the power of words to express. If one be at all of a romantic nature, he will be carried backward into those dimmer regions of legend with which this chapter has been occupied,—the misty twilight which intervenes between authentic story

and the utter darkness from which our race proceeds. Once I made the pilgrimage down the Danube from Regensburg to Vienna. Marcus Aurelius and Julian, Karl the Great and Richard Cœur de Lion, Gustavus, Wallenstein, Napoleon,—so impressive a series of the world's heroes as this have made the blue current upon which you are borne along memorable with their exploits,—that, and the towering hills and wide plains between which you pass. Often, however, it was to the shadowy phantoms of the ancient poem that my mind surrendered itself, and these were so overmastering sometimes as to leave scant room for the shapes substantial and authentic, august as these are. So I believe it must be with whoever submits himself to the fascination of the primeval minstrels.

At Passau the river Inn, still cold from the glaciers of Tyrol, swells the current of the Danube so that it becomes navigable. When you leave the train that has brought you thus far from Regensburg for the little steamer that is to carry you onward to Linz, in the pause before starting, throw your gaze across the river upon the black and towering crag and the fastness on its summit. Here it was that a good bishop, the uncle of Kriemhild, received her on her way to Etzel. There, too, in some secluded cell, nearly a thousand years ago, wrought patient Konrad,—while the monks threatened him for dealing with forbidden lore,—compiling the legends perishing from the people's mouths, that a successor of genius might elaborate them into the masterpiece that has survived. Think, too, of

the crusading hosts, inspired by Peter the Hermit, sweeping with their steel and scarfs and pennons, with steeds of noble mettle, and glittering shrines filled with relics, pausing for a bivouac in the meadows where stands the town to-day! Among the tents appears a reverend singer, and chants to the chiefs while they lie for a day, with armor thrown aside, the ringing strophes in which the harsh heroism of their ancestors and ours lies embalmed.

At last it is Vienna itself you will see, the capital, rolling vast out upon its plain, with the pinnacle of Saint Stephen's spire soaring into the air almost five hundred feet. If you ascend it, you will have before you the broad Marchfeld, whereon lie the villages of Aspern and Wagram. There too rode Sobieski and his host,—uplifted crescents and horse-tail standards storming against him,—when Islam was terrible. And, still earlier, it was there that bold Rudolph of Hapsburg defeated and slew Ottocar, king of Bohemia, and founded a dynasty beside which almost every other reigning house appears ephemeral. Go back of all these; think of the trooping chivalry of the Huns, the twenty-four tributary kings and their sparkling retinues, the lavish splendor and innumerable gifts, when Etzel celebrated at length the coming of his queen.

But if the East is interesting, even more so is the West,—the old Nibelungen home. Worms, the ancient city, sits, as of old, in the midst of the broad field, the hills of the Odenwald ranging blue before it. The French of Louis XIV.'s time burnt it to the ground; the streets seem scarcely older than

those of an American city, but there is one antique pile, some parts of which we may easily imagine go back to the reign of Gunther. It is the cathedral, — one of the most ancient in Germany, as beautiful as venerable. The rounded arches speak of a time when, as yet, the Gothic was not ; upon the blackened pinnacles and quaint ornaments of buttress and keystone have gazed in turn the men of nearly thirty generations. As you enter within the sombre shadows, it will be thrilling to you if you can go back in imagination to its earliest time, and make yourself feel that the figures of the old poet had once some real existence here. What massiveness in the columns, and how heavily majestic the rounded arches turn, high overhead, in the dusky gloom, which sunbeam can never reach ! What dim, religious light ! How worn the pavement, from the pressure of knees which have bent here and then mouldered, in a succession whose length we strive in vain to compass ! The minstrel must have known the pile ; try to believe that Siegfried and Kriemhild, and the fierce-glancing Hagen knew it too. There, in the space before the portal, Kriemhild and Brunhild strove for precedence, — the outburst of haughtiness for which a hero died and a whole race must at length fall. Here knelt Kriemhild, while as yet she was lovable ; and here lay the slain Siegfried, in his gem-incrusted coffin, the beauty not yet effaced on brow and form.

But grandest of all is the Rhine. The German has thrust forward his frontiers and taken the stream into the heart of the Fatherland. It flows, as it

were, from first to last through his history; for there is not a generation to which its banks have not been memorable. It flows through his poetry from first to last; the minstrel of the Nibelungen Lied gives the name throughout his strophes in thousandfold affectionate repetition,—as a lover murmurs the name of his darling. It reverberates in the songs of every age, and never was the German lyre more enamored of it than to-day. The Rhine, the glorious Rhine! It would seem, sometimes, as if the German would take it bodily into his arms. I saw once a performance of “Rhein-Gold,” the prelude to the great trilogy of Wagner, “The Ring of the Nibelungen.” Above me sat, in his ornamented box, the king of Bavaria, who had given the artist *carte-blanche* for his representation among the revenues of his kingdom. At first, in some indescribable way, as the curtain rose, the Rhine seemed flowing past us on the stage. We looked into its deeps as into the sides of an aquarium. Far upward toward the roof the sunlight seemed to glitter on the wavelets of the surface; the weeds below swayed to the shouldering current; the fair spirits, with whom legend peoples its abysses, swam white-armed before us, singing amid their buoyant curvings,—now floating to the surface, now sinking slowly to the depths. And what glittered at the bottom? It was a mysterious treasure, like the Nibelungen hoard, won by Siegfried in his youth, brought afterward to Kriemhild, at Worms, thrown at length into the stream between Worms and Lorsch by Hagen, the knowledge of its hiding-place perishing from the

earth with him ! They had taken the beloved river bodily, as it were, into their arms, and from prince and people went up a shout of joy.

A few months upon its banks, and even a stranger will catch, by contagion, something of the glow. I have leaped across it high up at the pass of the Splügen, where it makes its way, a thread-like rill, from its parent glacier. At its mouth I sailed out upon its waters to the dark North Sea. Midway in its course I have crossed it at Strassburg, where score upon score of armies have passed, — some east, some west ; some shouting victors, some groaning vanquished, — in the mighty series from the time when the chief of the Marcomanni went over it to meet Julius Cæsar, to the passage of the crown prince of Prussia on his way to Weissembourg and Wörth. But I love to remember it best as I saw it from a high hill of the Odenwald. The crag on which I stood might have echoed the horn of Siegfried, as he joyfully hunted on the morning of his death. The April rain-drops on grass and foliage shone like the jewels that fell from his shield, as in his death-struggle he smote at his murderer. Far below in the plain lay the city of Worms, the cathedral looming dark against the sky. The great river trailed some leagues of its length at my feet, and at one loop the setting sun made it glow with a ruddy splendor. It was as if the treasure of the Nibelungen were shining up to me from its secret caves. “It shall be forever hidden !” were the last words of Hagen, as he fell beneath the sword Balmung ; but I can almost fancy it was a gleam from the red

gold, and the flash of the mysterious jewels, that was revealed to my gaze that night. The light of sunset faded, and lo ! in the East, through the horizon mists, weaponed with splendor, vindicated her dominion in the gathering night, the solemn moon. There, glorious in silver light, whispering among the reeds of its margin, lapping lightly the barks upon its breast, the river passed grandly on into mystery, — even as on the night when it swept beneath the corpse of murdered Siegfried, borne across to his waiting wife, the oars dipping slow, repentance on the faces of the retinue, the spear of Hagen yet fixed in the heart it had sundered !

CHAPTER IV.

GUDRUN.

It has been judged fit to give to the epic of Gudrun—written about the year 1250—the name of the German Odyssey, as the Nibelungen Lied has been called the German Iliad. The name is a convenient one. Of the two poems, the Nibelungen Lied is the most warlike and tragic, and, in general, possesses superior interest. Gudrun is somewhat softer in character, though by no means wanting in pictures of strife; the most prominent figures are those of women; domestic life is portrayed; there is much restless wandering to and fro, often recalling the adventures of the prince of Ithaca. As in the case of the Nibelungen Lied, the name of the writer of Gudrun has not come down to us. This much can be said with certainty: that he had for the basis of his work, as did the writer of the companion-piece, old legends and lays. The influence of some of the poets of his time can be traced in his verses, but, before all, the Nibelungen Lied was his model,—which is believed to have been written about fifty years before. There are several allusions in the poem which make it certain that the minstrel was a wandering singer of the people; from the language, scholars believe him to have

come from Southern Germany; the manuscript which has come down to us was discovered some fifty years since, in Tyrol. The poem, however, has to do entirely with the North, and with the races to which our forefathers belonged,—a fact that should make it of especial interest to us. Struggling through refinements borrowed from the court poets, and ideas and embellishments gained from Christianity and the notions of chivalry, we may see the traits, still vivid, of the life and soul of our heathen ancestors. The horizon which stretches about us is one of the sea, with its storms, ships, sea-kings, and their voyages. The coasts and islands of the German ocean form the scene, and before our eyes is disclosed the bold activity of the sailor races,—which, driven by an eternal disquiet, ventured out amid storms, in their weak barks, to gather in other lands such booty as they prized. In the midst of barbaric harshness will be found things beautiful and admirable.

There sat at Hegelingen a powerful king, Hettel,¹ who ruled over Friesland, and who, upon the advice of his friends, determined to woo the beautiful Hilda, daughter of Hagen, the fierce king of Irland. The heroes Wate, Frut, and Horant undertake the message, upon well-prepared ships, going, with many knights and men, to Irland, where they give themselves out for merchants, driven away by Hettel of Hegelingen. They send to King Hagen rich presents, in return for which he promises them peace

¹ Adapted from Vilmar.

and guidance, presenting them at last to the women, who talk with them kindly. The queen and her daughter, Hilda, ask the old warrior Wate what he prefers, — to sit by beautiful women or fight in the battle with men. Then spoke the old Wate: “This thing seems better to me. By beautiful women I never yet sat very softly. One thing I could do easier, — fight with good warriors, when the time should come, in the fierce charge.” At that the lovely maid laughs, and they jest about it long in the hall. Then come battle-plays, in which Wate says he cannot fight, and asks King Hagen to teach him the use of arms. But when the old man gives the king skilful buffets, the king cries, “Never saw I pupil learn so quickly.” One evening Horant, vassal of Hettel, begins to sing so sweetly that all are surprised, and Hilda sends messengers asking him to delight them with his song every evening, which the hero willingly promises. The next day at dawn Horant begins to sing, so that all the birds in the hedges round about are silent before his sweet lay. The sleeping sleep not long. King Hagen himself hears it, sitting by his queen, and from the chamber they go forth upon the roof. Hilda, too, and her maids sit and listen. Yea, even the birds in the court of the king forget their notes; well hear the heroes also. His voice sounds with such power that the sick, as also the well, lose their sense. The beasts in the forest stop their feeding; the worms in the wood, the fishes in the waves, — all stop their movements. Forgotten within the church is the chant of the priests; also the bells sound less

sweetly than before. What he sang then seemed long to no one; to all who heard him was sorrow after Horant.

Then the fair Hilda has him come secretly to her, that he may sing yet more. She offers him the gold ring she wears on her finger, but he will accept from her only a girdle, to carry as a present to his master; and now, while she is moved, he discloses to her how King Hettel has sent them to woo her for him. Willingly is Hilda induced to fly secretly with them, and preparations are made. Hagen sees the preparations, and asks why the strangers desire to leave. Wate replies that Hettel has sent for them that he may be reconciled, and they are pressed to see again their dear ones whom they have left behind at home. But, before they go, will the king allow the women to behold the great treasures which they have kept stored up in the ships? This Hagen grants. The next morning the king rides, with many warriors and the women, to the beach; the women ascend the ships, the queen is separated from the princess, the sails are hoisted, and the guests move off with the maid. So they return with good fortune to Hettel, who welcomes the fair Hilda, esteeming himself happy to have won the maid. But already, on the following evening, appear the pursuing ships of Hagen. In the battle that follows, however, he is wounded and defeated. The grisly Wate, at Hilda's entreaty, heals the hurts he has himself caused; easily now does peace come to pass, and Hettel's marriage with Hilda is celebrated with pomp.

Hettel and Hilda, living together in the fullest happiness, have two children born to them,—a son, Ortwin, who is given to the veteran Wate to be educated, and a daughter, Gudrun, who soon grows to such exceeding beauty that her fame spreads through all lands, and many mighty princes woo her without success. She is refused to King Siegfried of Mohrenland, who therefore threatens Hettel's lands with plunder and fire. She is refused to King Hartmuth of Normandy; just so woos in vain King Herwig of Seeland. But Herwig appears with three thousand men before Hettel's castle, while all are sleeping. A battle follows, and then a truce. Herwig pleases all by his manly bearing and beauty, and Gudrun, when asked by her father whether she will take the noble hero for her husband, replies: "She desires no better lover." So they are betrothed, but the mother requires that the daughter shall remain a year longer with her.

Hettel and Herwig must straightway fare forth in their ships together to fight other enemies, and Hartmuth, the Norman, learning that the land is bare of defenders, determines to arm quickly and carry away the maid. His father, Ludwig, joins him. Presently they are at hand, and Hartmuth renews his suit to Gudrun, threatening her with his hatred if she will not follow. The steadfast maid replies that she is the betrothed of Herwig, and desires no other lover as long as she lives. Hartmuth and Ludwig hereupon fiercely storm the castle, and Gudrun, with her serving-women, is taken captive. The mother remains behind, loudly lamenting. At

her summons Hettel and Herwig return in haste, only to find the land desolate and Gudrun gone. But hope presently revives. Unexpectedly a fleet of pilgrims appears in sight, bound for the Holy Land, their sails marked with the sign of the cross. They are men of peace, and cannot resist when Hettel and Herwig, with their warriors, take possession of the crafts, with all their stores. There are seventy of them; these are filled at once with fighting men, and depart to recover the captive. Meantime the robbers, feeling secure, pause in their voyage upon an island,—the Wulpensand,—resting from their victory. Soon, in the distance, appear the crowding sails, all marked with the sign of the cross. “A fleet of pilgrims,” they say; “we may let our swords lie in their sheaths.” But when the ships come nearer, they behold the helmets of soldiers, and no longer doubt that Hettel and Herwig approach. They are attacked before they have time fairly to seize their arms. Wate springs first upon the shore, and Herwig, filled with battle-fury, leaps into the waves and stands up to his shoulders in the tide. Many a spear the enemy shoot at him, but he forces his way to the beach, where the battle grows fiercer. Disaster, however, is destined to fall upon the friends of Gudrun. The sea is sounding and the night falling, when her father, Hettel, meets Ludwig, the father of Hartmuth; they fight, and Hettel is slain. When the grim Wate learns of Hettel’s death he begins to rage like a wild boar, and the warriors see fire flash from the helmets he strikes, like the redness of the

sunset ; his followers do the like, but in the darkness friend cannot be told from foe, and they are forced to recede. The Normans, in the gloom, abandon the dreary island, and when at day-break Wate springs up to renew the fight, the camp is vacant, and no sail is to be seen upon the sea. The Normans are gone ; Wate and Herwig are too weak to follow. They gloomily bury the dead, lift the wounded into the ships, and determine to found a cloister upon the Wulpensand, where prayers may be offered for the souls of the slain.

Mournfully sail the heroes home. Ortwin, the brother of Gudrun, who had gone in the pilgrims' ships for his sister's rescue, does not appear before his mother to tell her of his father's death. Wate bears the gloomy news, and when the queen mourns aloud for her slain husband and the destroyed manhood of the land, the ancient champion cries, "Woman, cease lamenting. They will not return ; but when, after many days, the boys of the land have grown to be men, we will avenge upon the Normans our pain and shame." Wate feels that the disaster is a judgment upon them for their impiety in seizing the ships of the pilgrims. They are straightway returned to their owners, that the battle to come may not fail. It is resolved that the queen shall cause good ships to be built while the children grow to be men. But when the warriors are gone, the queen sends food to the priests on the island, that they may remember her in prayers before God. To that end she causes a minster to be built that is vast, and thereto a cloister and a hospital, so that it

is known in many lands. It is called the cloister of the Wulpensand.

Meanwhile the Normans have reached their country. When Ludwig, the father, beholds his castles, he shows them to the sad captive, Gudrun. "If thou wilt wed Hartmuth," he says, "thou shalt rule over a rich land." But when Gudrun declares, "I would rather die than take him as a lover," Ludwig grows angry, catches the maid by the hair, and throws her into the sea. Hartmuth draws her quickly forth again, and brings her once more into the ship, where she, with her women, weeps over the unworthy treatment, — concerning which Hartmuth reproaches his father bitterly. Now comes the old Norman queen, Gerlint, with her daughter, Ortrun, to receive the heroes; but when she will kiss Gudrun, the maid starts back in anger, for she thinks Gerlint has had the greatest share in her unhappiness; she it was who urged her son to carry Gudrun off. But toward Ortrun, Hartmuth's sister, is Gudrun kind, for she is well disposed, and seeks to relieve her sufferings. Gerlint urges a speedy marriage; since, however, Gudrun persists in her refusal, the queen grows angry, forcing her to undertake the lowest services, and separating her from her women. So is the unhappy one tormented three years and a-half, for which Hartmuth, returning from forays, chides his mother in anger. But nothing can induce the princess to receive Hartmuth's suit, till at last she is forced by the evil Gerlint to wash clothes at the shore. When one of the serving-women, Hildburg, shows compassion

for her unhappy mistress, she is compelled to help in the labor; but thereat both rejoice, for in this way they are again united.

Thirteen years pass, and Queen Hilda has in no way forgotten her daughter. She causes many good ships to be built. These being ready, and the boys of the land having grown to be men, she summons her friends for an expedition against the Normans. When all is ready the fleet sails away, but soon driven back by a contrary wind, it falls into great need. The ships are carried near a loadstone mountain; though the anchors are good, the ships are almost engulfed in the gloomy sea, and stand with their masts all bent. But a wind carries them once more into the flowing ocean, and at last they reach the Norman coast. The soldiers rest, while Gudrun's brother and lover, Ortwin and Herwig, go into the country to get intelligence.

Now Gudrun, at the shore with Hildburg, busy at her menial work, sees a sea-bird come swimming toward her; a messenger of God it is, which announces that Hilda yet lives, and has sent a great army to save them; that Ortwin and Herwig are already in the neighborhood with the ships, and that messengers will soon appear. The maids think no longer of their labor, but talk of the heroes who are to come to free them, until the day approaches its end. At night they receive harsh words from Gerlint for accomplishing so little, and are commanded to go to work the next day before dawn, since Palm Sunday is near, and guests are expected. When the maids arise from the hard

benches where they sleep, the earth is covered with snow, but they must go barefoot to the beach. While they wash the clothes they send many a longing look over the dark sea, and at last behold a bark with two men. As the strangers land, an impulse to flee seizes the maids, but they soon return. "They were both wet," says the song. "They were in poor clothing, and, besides, the March wind blew cold. It was in the time when the winter went toward its end, and the sea everywhere floated with ice. Their pain was great, for through their thin garments appeared their lovely bodies. That the messengers did not know them caused them sorrow." The heroes question them, and at length Herwig says to his companion, "Truly, Ortwin, if your sister Gudrun is alive, this must be she, for never yet saw I woman so like her." "She of whom you speak," says Gudrun, untruthfully, "has died through great suffering." But the recognition is not long postponed,—the lovers show their betrothal rings, and fall into one another's arms.

One naturally supposes that Gudrun will be taken without delay to her friends, but the soldierly punctiliousness of her brother Ortwin stands in the way. "I do not think it should be so," he says; "If I had a hundred sisters, I would let them die before I would act in a cowardly way in a strange land, stealing secretly from my enemy what was taken from me by force." Gudrun must again be the prize of battle. The heroes depart, promising to return with the host, and Gudrun, overjoyed,

spurns her labor, throwing the costly apparel into the sea. When chided at night by Gerlint, she answers proud and defiant, till the queen, growing angry, causes her to be bound, that she may be beaten with rods. Now Gudrun shows her cunning. She promises to listen at last to Hartmuth's suit, at which mother and son become overjoyed, treating her with all honor, and restoring to her the serving-women from whom she has been separated. To remove from the castle as many soldiers as possible, Gudrun begs that Hartmuth's vassals may be summoned to the wedding, whereupon the men are sent away in troops to carry the message. "Then they slept joyful-hearted; they knew that many a good knight would come to them who would help them out of their great need."

Meanwhile Herwig and Ortwin, returning to their friends, tell them of the interview with Gudrun; and as her kindred begin to weep at the unworthy treatment which the king's daughter has suffered, the grisly Wate cries out angrily, "You behave like old women; you know not why. It is not becoming heroes good, rich in praise. If you wish to help Gudrun, make red the clothing which her white hands have washed. In that way can you serve her." Then the host comes forth from its hiding-place, and before dawn stands before the Norman walls, when Hartmuth, suddenly summoned by the watchman, exclaims, "I recognize the standards of princes from twenty lands. They come to avenge upon us their old shame." At his command the gates are opened, and the two kings, Ludwig and

Hartmuth, father and son, proceed forth at the head of their warriors. Herwig encounters Ludwig, and with a mighty stroke severs his head from his trunk ; whereat Queen Gerlint, on the battlements above, bewails his fate. A faithless guard falls with naked sword upon Gudrun to slay her, as the cause of their misfortune, but Hartmuth hears her cries. From the field he shouts to the murderer on the wall, and the knave springs back, for he fears the wrath of the king. Meanwhile Wate rages with fury, and even Hartmuth almost loses his life. At Gudrun's feet falls his sister, Ortrun : " Have pity, noble prince's child, upon so many of our people who lie here smitten ! Behold, O maid, my father and my kindred all are dead, or near to death, and now does the bold Hartmuth stand in great danger. Let this speak for me ; when no one pitied thee, of all who are here, I alone was thy friend. Whatever harm was done to thee, that always I sorrowed for." Then Gudrun pities her faithful friend, and cries from the wall until Hartmuth's life is spared, and he is made prisoner ; but the castle is taken and plundered, Wate raging grimly, with gnashing teeth, piercing eyes, and beard an ell broad. With fearful voice he asks for Gerlint. Gudrun generously seeks to save her foe, but the queen is drawn forth. " Now say, Queen Gerlint," says the hero scornfully, " do you longer afflict the fair wash-women ?" With that he smites her with the sword.

Henceforth all is glee. The ships depart, full of the rejoicing victors and reclaimed captives, whom the aged Queen Hilda, forewarned by heralds,

meets at Hegelingen, upon the shore. "Who could buy with gold the bliss when the child and the mother kiss one another?" Grisly, broad-bearded Wate is also kissed, and the remaining heroes. Great preparations are made for the marriage of Gudrun and Herwig. Ortwin, moreover, woos the noble Ortrun, and Hartmuth, liberated and forgiven, the faithful Hildburg, who stood with Gudrun in the ice upon the beach when the deliverers arrived." "When the rich kings came together," so ends the song, "the heroes strove which of the women was most beautiful. The marriage was celebrated with the greatest splendor. The kings returned home, swearing to one another firm fidelity; and they vowed to one another that they would always honorably bear their princely dignity, in a manner worthy of their lofty fathers."

Gudrun has sometimes been preferred to the Nibelungen Lied, but not wisely; it is, however, far superior in interest to the court romances of the same period. Without doubt it has for its basis old legends and popular songs, with which have become intertwined materials from a later age. Although the wild spirit of the bold sea-rovers is drawn in many places with the liveliest truth, something milder is blended with it. Even the grim Wate, in whom, before all, the character of Northern heroism is stamped, who prefers "to hear the noise of battle to sitting by beautiful women," atones in part for his savage fierceness by his devotion to his king. In the character of Gudrun there is much beauty, though she is not faultless. She guards the fidelity

she has sworn to her lover unconquerably, submitting to the lowest humiliations ; and although the recollection of the hardships she has suffered fills her heart, she is not revengeful, but interposes, vainly indeed, to save Gerlint, her tormentor, from the sword of Wate. But she does not scruple to be untruthful in telling Ortwin and Herwig, upon the seashore, before they recognize her, that she is dead ; and though we may think stratagem not unjustifiable toward her Norman captors, she undertakes rather too joyfully the deceptions which lead to the capture of the citadel.

To us, I think, Gudrun, like the Nibelungen Lied, will be principally interesting as a portrayal of our forefathers. In Gudrun the picture is far less plain than in the companion epic, since it is much more overlaid by accretions from the after ages. A fine, picturesque heathenism, however, does look through ; and often in the verse we seem to hear the roar of the broad, tempestuous seas, in battle with which the children of the ancient race still take pleasure. “Both poems,” says a high authority, “are to the nation an everlasting glory. They reach across, as it were, into those old times, with their deeds, customs, and ideas, out of which the voices of discontented Roman enemies extolled the bravery, the trustiness, the chastity of our venerable ancestors. When we behold these poems, full of healthy strength, of sturdy although rude ideas, of noble morals, we hear quite other testimonies speak for the ancestral excellences of our stock than the dry declarations of the chroniclers ; and, in germ,

we shall already, among our fathers, find the honor, the considerateness, and all the creditable qualities which distinguish us to-day in the circle of European nations."¹

"To characterize in the shortest way," says another critic, "the Nibelungen Lied, let me recall a scene from the Alpine world. Bursting forth from the blue glacier grottos of the Finster Aarhorn, the river Aar flows, at first quietly and gently, past the Grimsel, upon a broad expanse which it murmuringly traverses. But the colossal mountains to the right and left press constantly closer upon it. Masses of granite tower before the current; its course becomes always more tortuous; ever wilder grows the roar in the narrow channel; ever quicker hurry on the foaming waves; ever gloomier threaten the countless crags and precipices; until at length, in mad career and with fearful thunder-crash, the stream plunges headlong into the gloomy gulf of Handeck."² The student of the Nibelungen Lied, who at the same time knows the Alps, will recognize the excellence of the scholar's parallel; and if I were to search for an apt symbol of the Gudrun, it might be found in others of those mountain streams, which, after the torture of cataracts and the smothering of sunless abysses, flow forth at length among the trees and grass of laughing lowland plains, — at first tumult and despair, then the fairest peace.

¹ Gervinus: *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung*.

² Joh. Scherr.

When the voyager approaches the shore of the Old World, and sees at length the iron-bound Irish coast, ledges of granite, seamed and battered so long by the sledges of the surf, the scream of the sea-bird meanwhile answering the wild wind, he will behold the little vessels of the fishermen, the hulls scarcely visible, the brown sails bellying to the breeze, while the mast leans far to the leeward. In guise very similar did the three heroes of Friesland,—Wate, Frut, and Horant,—carry off over these seas the fair Hilda, their little barks of osiers covered with hide and bound with thongs, the sails always wet with foam from the near-at-hand waves. So must have looked our pirate progenitors, of whom these figures are representative. Out from the German ocean the blast blew strong against us, bleak and full of snow,—it was the end of winter,—as we pressed on past Normandy, the old realm of Hartmuth, into the wider sea. It was a sea full of gales and mist,—a tossing, whitening surface, beneath a sky overcast. Of the distant shore the sunken coast-line barely remained visible, now and then a low island, desolate, with its white sand,—perhaps the Wulpensand. At night the storm grew wilder,—a murky darkness, which a solitary beacon far down amid the waters did not relieve. At noon we anchored off a wintry shore, a slow, gray river pouring out ice-masses, the beach heaped high with snow. Among these scenes the barefooted Gudrun came to wash the clothes, while she watched for the messengers whom the sea-bird had promised. Spots they are bleak and dangerous to-day; nurs-

ing in that old time the hardihood that gave the sailor-races their dominion in the world; not wilder the roar of the blasts than their own battle-cries, not more relentless the dash of their tides than the stroke of their axes, not darker the heavens than the movements of their spirits; yet with traits in them too of manful virtue.

Before we leave the consideration of the poetry which the people loved, a class of legends must be noticed,—like those of the *Nibelungen Lied* and *Gudrun*, for a long period transmitted orally, and at the same time with them committed, at length, to writing. Allusion is made to the *Animal Legends*,¹ a class peculiarly racy with the life of the Teutons, which have kept pace and place with the stock throughout its whole progress, and are yet in fresh remembrance. The roots of these legends lie in the wild simplicity of the oldest races. Such a people fastens passionately upon the phenomena of nature, rejoicing with spring and summer, lamenting with autumn, bowed down in the heavy imprisonment of winter. With ready anthropomorphism it lends to these changes its own human feelings, developing with the personification colossal myths, sometimes pleasant, sometimes fearful. Still more intimately does such a race connect itself with the more closely related animal world. One of Hawthorne's most charming characters is the weird creature, Donatello, the faun; and no picture in which he appears is quite so attractive as

¹ Thiersagen.

that one of the solitary Roman garden, in which Donatello disports himself, communing in strange sympathy with the brute world. He whistles to the birds in their own notes, who flock to him fearlessly ; with beasts he enters into similar relations of mutual confidence. He is himself harmlessly happy, and makes happy the wild creatures, who, feeling his likeness to themselves, take part in his gambols and respond to his advances. We may hold that man has a nobler origin than development from some brutish type ; yet, as we trace him backward into his primeval state, he becomes more and more faun-like, until there comes to pass something of that community of feeling between him and the brute world that Hawthorne pictures. The animal legend can arise only among a primeval people, who are still hunters or herdsmen. These see in the ravenous wolf a powerful companion, strong and skilful almost as themselves ; in the grim bear, a hero ruling wood and heath. As they wander through the dim depths and sunny glades of the undisturbed forest, wolf and bear, and the red-bearded fox lurking at the wood's edge, are hunters like themselves, companions, and receive, besides their own brute names, familiar titles,—Isengrim, Brun, Reinhart. Shepherd and hunter felt that it was good to be on friendly terms, in those solitudes, with these forest comrades. Not alone were their teeth and claws formidable. In the lithe form the primitive man believed a demon was lurking ; in the wolf-soul, shining forth from the anger-sparkling eyes, there was something un-

canny ; the bear was the embodiment of something dark and mysterious, endowed with magic ; in a certain way the brute was exalted even above man, and not to be restrained by physical power alone.¹ The animal legends that came into being were numberless, and at length combined into a rude epic. It was full of truth, of nature, resting as it did upon the traditions of many centuries, knitted to life by a thousand threads. One may say the work came to pass by itself. Its earliest form who shall describe ? After long tradition it was first written down in Latin, in the Netherlands. Sometimes the stories were modified, to convey moral instruction, into fables ; again they became vehicles of satire. The epic came again into Germany in the middle of the thirteenth century, the poet who gave it a new elaboration being Heinrich of Glîchesære. Down the ages it has descended with popularity undiminished, the great Gôthe being the last to lay hand to the venerable material, in the famous *Reynard the Fox*.

The work of Heinrich of Glîchesære exists only in fragments. Two or three specimens of the grotesque stories will suffice, interesting as they are, through the rime of age which rests upon them. Now the wolf is thirsty. The fox offers to procure him wine, and leads him and his wife to a convent cellar, where, after becoming intoxicated, they are heartily beaten by the monks. Again, plagued by sharp hunger, the wolf finds the fox, who professes

¹ Vilmar.

to have become himself a monk, eating roasted eels. Isengrim wishes also to become a monk, for the sake of the good living. "A monk," says Reinhart, "must have a tonsure," and in order to produce one he pours hot water over Isengrim's head, so that hair and skin are scalded off; but the angry wolf is appeased when the fox calls his attention to the fish. When Isengrim asks for a share, "It is all gone," says the fox, "but I will show you a pond so full of them that nobody cares for them." Reinhart leads him then to a frozen pond, in the ice of which a hole has been cut to draw water. He ties a bucket to the tail of Isengrim, and bids him hold bucket and tail in the hole, while he stirs up the fish. The night is cold, and the tail at length firmly frozen in; whereupon the fox, with feigned surprise and grief, goes off, promising to find help. A knight appears, who sets his dog upon the wolf, then cuts at him with his sword. The tail is severed, and the wolf, in that way set free, flees. Reinhart meanwhile comes to a well, provided with two buckets; in the well he sees his own image. Thinking it to be his wife, he jumps down for love, and sees then no way of extricating himself, until the wolf approaches. Reinhart calls out to him that he is in Paradise, which induces Isengrim to seat himself in the empty bucket; this immediately sinks, and the fox is drawn out by Isengrim's weight. As the trickster hurries off, monks, who come to draw water, beat the wolf half dead. At length the lion—the king—summons a general court. He is sick; an ant has crept through his ear into his brain.

He considers his affliction a punishment from God, sent because he has postponed so long the condemnation of Reinhart for his ill deeds. Brun, the bear, is sent to bring the culprit before the assembly. Arriving at the fox's quarters, he is diverted from his purpose by the promise of honey, and led to a split trunk, where he is told the bees have stored. He puts his head into the crevice; Reinhart draws out a wedge; the bear is caught. Peasants approach, and Brun escapes with the loss of his skin and ears. With similar cunning Reinhart manages to reinstate himself in the favor of the king; and after revenge upon his enemies, devises roguish rewards for his friends. To the elephant the king gives Bohemia, where, however, he is lamentably beaten. The camel receives an abbey, but when he takes possession the nuns rise against him and drive him into the Rhine. Reinhart at length conquers, supplants his foes, and lives happily in his stronghold.

From this brief glance at the Animal Epic, as it was treated by Heinrich of Glichesäre, the rude humor that pervades it may be caught, and an appreciation of the intimacy with the beast-world which comes to pass in a primitive, faun-like race. In the animal legends are to be recognized many a familiar nursery tradition. When little Red Riding Hood falls into the snare of her pretended grandmother; when the fox gets out of the well by entrapping the wolf; when Silver Hair has her adventure with the three bears, — when our children, at the dawn of consciousness, seize upon these, they

grasp immemorial heirlooms which for ages have
fallen to Teuton children, as they come from the
cradle to the knee of the story-telling mother.

CHAPTER V.

THE MINNESINGERS.

The poetry which has been considered in the three preceding chapters, — that based upon the popular legends, — and which, though neglected by the courts, was loved among the folk, possesses, as has been said, at the present time, more interest than any other poetry of the age of the Hohenstauffen. A vast body of literature, however, has come down from the period, of a different kind, much of it worthy of study. The term *minne* has various meanings, the oldest and best being that of kind remembrance of a friend. In the worthiest of the minnesongs, to which we now proceed, the word is used in this sense; but it acquired at last a licentious signification, to which many of the songs correspond. The Minnesingers proper are those who sing lyrical poems in honor of *minne*, or love. The name came, however, to have a wide application, embracing many who did not sing of love at all. The poets of the Hohenstauffen period already considered, who wrote the Nibelungen Lied, Gudrun, and the Animal Epic, were, taking the term in its widest sense, Minnesingers, although the designation is more properly borne by the more elegant poets of the courts and castles. Nearly two hundred bards are known to whom the name can be given. So

far as they were court poets they were imitators of the Troubadours, with whose songs they became acquainted when, in the time of the crusades, the chivalry of France swept eastward through Germany toward the Holy Land. Great attention was paid by the Minnesingers to the outward form of their verses, it being considered important that new combinations of rhyme and rhythm should be constantly invented. The songs are as various in character as the individual singers. Nithart pleases himself with narrating for his high-born hearers his adventures among the peasants, his tricks upon them, the suffering he himself undergoes in return, as he dances and laughs among the village girls and their lovers. The school-master of Esslingen satirizes the ambition of an unpopular potentate: "The king can nobody resist. Therefore, take care, O God! that he does not creep into Thy power; and be watchful, O Peter! that he does not get the gate of Heaven into his hands." Konrad of Würzburg praises the Virgin Mary in a rhapsody which, though affected and overloaded with ornament, is not without beauty. "As the sun shines through glass without doing it injury, so was the Holy Virgin pierced through by God. She is like a crystal or a beryl, which remains cold while the sun kindles a taper through it. She is like the dew, to which in the bright meadow the sunny look of God comes, drying it away. As the unicorn cannot be hunted, but comes of its own accord to a pure maid, and, resting on her lap, goes to sleep, so has Christ come to her. Sun and moon receive their splendor

from her. Twelve stars are her throne, and the moon her foot-stool. She is exalted like the cypress in Zion and the cedar on Lebanon ; her virtue towers like the palm in Cadiz ; she is a living paradise of the noblest flowers ; her sweet fragrance is pleasanter than balsam and musk.”¹ *Regenbogen*, once a smith, one of the later Minnesingers, utters sturdy prophecies which show that the Reformation was already in the air. “The kaiser will cause right to be appreciated, convert the Jews, and scourge the arrogance of the priests. He will destroy the cloisters, cause the nuns to marry, and make them useful in the world. Then will come good times.” His contemporary, *Frauenlob*, who is the link between the Minnesingers and the Mastersingers, by whom they were succeeded, sings poetry full of the praise of women, and of a mystical piety.

In thousandfold repetition the Minnesingers celebrated love. Sometimes the watchman set to warn the lovers of coming danger utters his admonition. Sometimes the messenger sings his errand. There is often mention of natural objects, of the beauty of the earth and skies in spring and summer, but in a stiff, conventional way, which makes it doubtful whether there was among them much genuine appreciation of the earth’s fairness. To see the lyrical Minnesingers at their best, let us study somewhat carefully the noblest of the figures which we encounter in the great company, — *Walther von der Vogelweide*. He was probably a Swiss, of a family

¹ Kurz.

beneath the class of nobles, a contemporary of the Emperor Frederick II., in the first part of the thirteenth century. He spent some years in Austria, and being at length neglected by the court, began a life of wandering, during which he went, as he says, from the Elbe to the Rhine and to Hungary, from the Drave to the Po and the Seine. He is said to have taken part in the contest of the minstrels at the Wartburg, in which those vanquished were to be put to death,—a festival much celebrated in song, but whose historic truth is doubted. Like his contemporaries generally, he was carried away by the crusading spirit, urging his emperor to assume the cross, and himself taking part. His character was most manly, and in many things he was far beyond his time. He was especially bold in his denunciations of extravagant papal claims and other abuses of the Church. His influence, within and without Germany, became so great that the emperor, recognizing his merits, gave him a property and a title. Tired of wandering, he had begged pathetically for a home. “Pity me,” he cries to the emperor, “that when my art is so rich I am allowed to go poor. If I could warm myself on my own hearth, how would I then sing of the birds and the flowers and of love! And if a beautiful wife offer me sweet affection, I would cause lilies and roses to spring forth from her cheeks. Now I come late and ride early. Guest, woe to thee, woe! The host may well sing of the green turf. He only who has a hearth of his own can cause his song to sound forth joyfully.” His grant was of small value, and he

always remained poor. Faithful to his lyre, he lived on to old age, declaring that he had for forty years sung songs of affection. He was nobly patriotic, scourging without fear the faults of his time. Unlike many of his class, he wrote only lays that were high and pure. Here is one of his love-songs, which seems to me full of tenderness and grace: "Thoroughly sweet and full of loveliness are pure women. There was never anything so lovely in air, or on earth, or in all the green meadows. Lilies and roses, when they shine in the May dew through the grass, and the song of little birds, are, compared with this charm, without color and sound. If one sees beautiful women, that can refresh the troubled spirit and extinguish at the same time all lamenting, when their sweet red lips entrancingly laugh in love, and arrows dart from their eyes to the bottom of man's heart. Lady, nobly sweet, highly praised, full of pure goodness, thy modest person inspires the spirit. Thy lips are redder than the rose amid the dews. God has exalted and ennobled pure women, so that one may prize and honor them forever more. The treasure of the world, with all rapture, lies in them. For discontent and sadness is nothing so good as to look on a beautiful maid well disposed, when she gives to her lover a pleasant, heart-felt smile."¹ This song may be taken to represent the minnesongs when at their best, — sensuous, not sensual; far enough from descending to licentiousness, showing simple naturalness of feel-

¹ Pfeiffer u. Bartsch: Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters.

ing, and a love of nature such as soon after appeared in English literature in Chaucer. In the following song Walther, forsaking, as he often did, the ordinary themes of the Minnesingers, strikes his lyre with noble manhood. "Who slays the lion? Who slays the giant? That does he who tames himself, and brings his members all saved out of the wild storm into the harbor of true virtue. He who can show an assumed virtue may therewith for a while play the hypocrite. Easily borrowed is the appearance; quickly it is lost again."¹

Walther von der Vogelweide died in Würzburg, and nothing we know concerning him is quite so picturesque as the story of his grave. An old chronicle says that in his will provision was made for sinking four holes into the stone that should cover him, into which corn every day was to be poured for the feeding of the wild birds. Under bright May sunlight I beheld the gray old town, fortifications of the present century rising side by side with structures that have stood for ages, and beyond the dark current of the Main the threatening Marienberg, as gloomy to-day as when, in the Thirty Years War, it tried to defy the victorious Gustavus. A hundred great associations the city has with men and events, but to the heart of the pilgrim none has such interest as that the ancient city holds the grave of the noblest of the Minnesingers. As the eye falls upon battlement, sharp roof, and soaring tower, on the approach, one won-

¹ Pfeiffer u. Bartsch: *Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters*.

ders where it was that the children of the choir feasted the birds, gathering thick each day, year in and year out, "on the tree that overshadowed all the place," brushing, as with grateful wings, the minstrel's effigy on the tombstone beneath.

While among the vast throng of the Minnesingers towers now and then a figure full of genius and manly strength like Walther, others are to be remarked fantastic and absurd to the last degree. One or two types must be presented. Master John Hadlaub, of Zürich, began his service of his love when he was but a child, he tells us, she also being as young. She was of high station; he poor, and the son of an humble citizen. In his youth he sought long for an opportunity to confess his love, at length fastening with a fish-hook a letter to his mistress' robe as she went home one morning early from matins. She treated him with great harshness, so that he fell down in his suffering; but certain lords lifted him up, led him to her seat, and gave him her hand to hold, which strengthened him again. In pity for him, she looked at him pleasantly, whereupon he pressed her hand so hard that she bit him to free herself. A greater happiness could not have happened to him; her mouth was sweet beyond words to express; her bite so delicately tender! It only caused him pain because it lasted so short a time. At a later time she promised to receive him kindly, but at his coming locked herself into a room until Hadlaub had left the house. A good knight, however, comforted him with the assurance that she had spoken well of

him. Once he saw her caress a child, in whose place he longed to stand. When she had departed he took the child, embraced it, then kissed it upon the spot which her lips had touched, in this way experiencing great happiness. The reader will not care to know more of Master Hadlaub's love experiences. He is among the last of the Minnesingers, living at a time when the world was losing sympathy for their extravagances. As one follows his detail it is plain that the object of his passion was a good-hearted girl, who honestly pitied him, but was embarrassed and troubled by his absurd wooing. Those who pretended to aid him really made him an object of ridicule. With Hadlaub's rhymes before us, we can make out a lively picture from the life that five hundred years ago went forward on the shores of that sapphire lake,—the merry, mocking company, the well-disposed maiden, teased and mortified beyond measure, and in the midst the love-sick simpleton.

A generation or two earlier the follies of Hadlaub would not have become a laughing-stock. The temper of the time was such that absurdities far more fantastic excited admiration instead of contempt, so strange had become the taste of the world of knights and courtiers. Ulrich von Lichtenstein has left, in his book called "*Frauendienst*,"—"Service of Ladies,"—a detailed account of his life, which is full of curious and amusing pictures. He was born at the beginning of the thirteenth century, of a noble family of Austria, in his twelfth year choosing a lady to whose service he might de-

vote his life. He served her for five years as a page; she was already married and established. He was trained in arms, and when he reached manhood received the castle of his ancestors. He sends his lady a song in which he begs her to consent that he may devote himself to her service; she praises the song, but treats scornfully his petition, principally on account of a deformity of the singer's mouth, whereupon the minstrel submits to a surgical operation that he may become more acceptable. The lady remains hard-hearted, however, whereupon the steadfast knight continues to send her songs,—not discouraged, although they are at once returned. Upon one of the missives thus rejected he observes at length that something is written; but since he cannot read, and his clerk is not at hand, he carries the writing upon his heart ten days and nights, ignorant of its purport. At length the clerk returns, with whom Ulrich retires into a secret chamber, there learning that the message is to the effect that many a man speaks what he does not feel in his heart.

Ulrich now goes everywhere engaging in tournaments, and gaining many a prize. At Brixen his finger is hurt, and soon after he hears that his lady laments his misfortune. She, moreover, sends him an air as yet unknown in Germany, to which she asks him to adapt words. Ulrich straightway composes a song to the air, upon the worth of woman, which so pleases the lady that she sends him a present of a puppy; she remains, however, cold toward him, complaining that he has done too little for her.

When Ulrich hears this he causes the finger which has been hurt to be cut off, and has a little book prepared, bound in grass-green velvet. "I bade a goldsmith," says the knight, "make two gold bands for me, in which the book was enclosed. The clasp was very pretty and suggestive, being in the form of two clasped hands. Inside the book we put the finger." The singular present is sent to the chosen one, who receives it kindly, but laments the deed of Ulrich, which she declares she would not have believed possible for a reasonable man. She takes care to add that she is sorry for the finger, not because she loves Ulrich, but because he has lost it for her sake; that she intends to keep the finger carefully in her drawer, and look at it every day; it will, however, not affect her if he serves her a thousand years. The persistent Ulrich determines, nevertheless, to undertake a great adventure in her honor.

In the winter of 1227 he goes to Venice, and there causes a great quantity of costly female apparel to be made, among which are three mantles of white velvet. He buys, moreover, two heavy locks of hair, entwined with pearls. Twelve squires receive white garments; snow-white is everything carried by him and his train, — helm, shield, and a hundred new spears. His coat of arms is of fine cloth, handsomely plaited; his horse is caparisoned with velvet. When all is ready he despatches a messenger announcing that Venus, queen and goddess of love, is coming, and will teach the knights of all the country round the service of ladies; that she will rise from the sea on the day after Saint

George's day, and proceed to Bohemia. Every knight who will come to meet her and break a spear with her shall receive a gold ring for his darling, which will make her more beautiful, and cause her to love him truly. Whoever is conquered by Venus shall spread the fame of Ulrich's mistress to all the quarters of the world ; but whoever shall overcome the goddess shall receive all her horses. On the journey she will allow neither her countenance nor her hands to be seen, and speak with nobody. She will outlaw every knight who hears of her journey and does not present himself.

On the day appointed, Ulrich made his appearance upon the sea-shore, in a little village of the Adriatic, in the midst of a great crowd. First rode his marshal and cook ; then followed his swan-white banner, between two trumpeters ; then servants with pack-horses. At last came Ulrich's shield and helmet, followed by a drummer, spear-bearers, two maids clothed in white, and two good fiddlers, who, says the book, fiddled a jolly march. At last came Ulrich himself, on horseback, dressed in women's clothes. His mantle was of white velvet ; his hat decorated with white pearls and surmounted by the two heavy locks of hair, which, also decorated with pearls, hung down to his waist. His face was veiled, and his hands covered with gloves of silk. The progress to Bohemia is described in detail. At Glockenitz he met his wife, with whom he remained a day without being recognized by others. He was married, it seems, his wife not being at all the mistress in whose honor he was seeking adventures ;

his good understanding with her, however, from all that appears, was not at all interrupted. As he proceeded on his journey his train grew larger, until at length he entered Vienna with eighty knights, where great festivities and tournaments took place. After these the train again went forward, Ulrich giving away, to knights who responded to his summons, two hundred and seventy-one rings, overthrowing several in combat, and receiving himself a number of wounds.

In spite of his devotion the lady was not won, but treated him so capriciously that he wept, and was only saved from suicide by the intervention of a companion. He served, however, devotedly for some years longer, until, as he says, his lady did to him a thing which, if he dared say what it was, would call forth compassion for him from all honest men. Then, at last, he renounced her, presently taking up the service of another lady, in whose honor he undertook new progresses, apparently meantime on good terms with his wife, who remained with her children in her husband's castle.¹

Ulrich von Lichtenstein wrote the *Frauendienst* when he was more than fifty years old, a book quite important to us as a graphic picture of a courtly poet and his work. It was written and received by his generation in all seriousness. Ulrich, as a wealthy and high-born noble, plays a part in history, showing many proofs of abundant bravery. In his old age he was accused of high treason, and de-

¹ Kurz

manded the ordeal of battle. His castles, however, were destroyed, and he died probably in poverty. The old manuscript of the *Frauendienst* gives a picture representing the hero in full armor, on horseback, with a drawn sword in his hand. Venus, with an arrow in one hand and a flame in the other,—a figure of considerable size,—forms the crest of the top-heavy helmet. The knight is galloping through a rolling sea, in which sea-monsters are fighting together, which perhaps is intended to recall the alleged rising from the Adriatic.

The extravagance of Ulrich is so very fantastic that some scholars cannot believe he was a fair representative of his class, preferring to consider him as a mediæval Don Quixote crazed by reading French romances. There is abundant evidence, however, to show that in the courtly circles he was held in his time in honor, and that his example was often followed,—a fact which perhaps may be taken as indicating a singular lack of the perception of the ludicrous. The popular instincts of this time were far sounder, a healthy sense of humor being by no means wanting, which did much to make the songs and poems intended for the folk still more natural and attractive. Until late in the Middle Ages a favorite figure in the stories of the people, to which we recur for a moment for comparison, is the monk Ilsan, a character in the “*Rose-garden at Worms*,”—a poem in which many legends are blended, and which received its latest elaboration in the fifteenth century, after furnishing material to several poets of preceding ages. Kriemhild holds

court at Worms, where she has a beautiful rose-garden, which Siegfried, with twelve heroes, guards against all strangers. Whoever vanquishes these guardians with an equal number of heroes is entitled to become liegeman of Kriemhild's father; besides, each of the victors shall receive as reward a rose-wreath and a kiss from Kriemhild. At the suggestion of his vassal, Hildebrand, Dietrich of Berne sets forth to undertake the contest, and in the story of the expedition the main figure is the monk Ilsan, a personage resembling Friar Tuck of the Robin Hood legends. He is the brother of Hildebrand, and has been twenty years in the cloister. He has become old and gray, but since a twelfth hero is required, he is to be taken from his retirement to fill the place. The adventurers knock hard at the gate of the monastery, and Ilsan's rough voice is heard from within, threatening that they shall pay dear for it who disturb the peace of the brotherhood. "Sir," says a monk who has looked out, "an old man stands at the gate who has three wolves upon his shield, and a golden snake upon his helmet-crest." "By the god of war!" cries Ilsan, "that is my brother Hildebrand." "And with him is a youth upon a swift horse, with a grim lion on his shield." "That is the Lord Dietrich," cries Ilsan, and the gate of the cloister is opened. "*Benedicite*, brother," cries Hildebrand, to whom Ilsan replies with an old soldier's oath, asking why he is always on some warlike enterprise. "We are going to Worms," is the reply, "to see the river Rhine, to gain rose-garlands, and a woman's

kiss." Ilse no sooner hears that he is bidden to the expedition than his old battle passion is aroused. With a lusty throw, he flings his cowl into the grass, revealing beneath his old fighting garb, which has never been laid aside. As he departs, the remaining monks run after him and wish him ill,—it has been his habit to hale them about by their ears and beards when they have refused to do his will. Arrived at Worms, he gives rein to his spirit of wild mischief. He rolls like a horse in the flowers of the garden, uses his fists against all who come in his way, and when, after the victory, in which he vanquishes the minstrel Volker, he is to receive the kiss of Kriemhild, he rubs her face sore with his rough beard. The rose-wreaths which fall to his share he takes back with him to the cloister, and presses them, scratch as they may, down upon the heads of the monks who insulted him at his departure. He orders them to help him make atonement for his sins, and when they refuse, he ties their beards together, and hangs them, two and two, across a pole.

There is nothing malicious in Ilse; all he does and says is in rough, exuberant sport. Every word and act violates propriety, and nothing could be more shocking, as judged by the finical court standards. The cloisters of the time furnished, no doubt, plenty of originals for such a portrayal. Many a wild spirit, momentarily sick of tumult, must have sought in them an asylum. In the tedium of their life, they sometimes reverted to their old ways, chanted to one another the war-songs, as in the

case of the old monks at Fulda, to whom we owe the song of Hildebrand; and when animal spirits were not quenched by the discipline, no doubt the convent precincts resounded with the horse-play and rough laughter of the camp.

Before the examination of the literature of the Hohenstauffen period is concluded, an important class of poets remains to be considered, — the writers of the Court Epics. As has been noticed, the Popular Epics are derived from legends relating to the ancient deities, and the history of the Teutonic race in primeval days. In interest the Popular Epics surpass all that has been transmitted to us from the period we are studying. In treating their subjects, the minstrels show a poetic gift which, however rude it may be, sways the heart mightily. The subjects themselves are of absorbing fascination. The legends they preserve, in which we dimly see the spirit and movement of our forefathers in distant days, when as yet no Teuton hand had traced a letter, affect the soul only with a deeper power as the race proceeds onward in its history.

The Court Epics have an interest inferior to the Popular Epics, according to the general judgment, both on account of the subjects chosen and the manner in which they are treated. Generally, the subjects are foreign; or, if German material is selected, it is such as had first received a foreign treatment. The Trojan War, Alexander and the heroes of classic days, saints and biblical person-

ages, Charlemagne and his Paladins, — above all, Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, — are themes which gained attention. We cannot judge the court poets severely. What seemed good to their taste has been attractive ever since to poets, even to our own time. Morris and Tennyson, — yes, the greatest names of all, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Shakespeare himself, — are elaborators of stories often many times told, and coming from foreign sources, often the same as those treated by the old German singers. As to manner, while the popular poets followed their own simple genius, so filling their verses with an inspiration, — rude, but genuine, and of the freshest, — the court poets were translators, adapters, imitators, postponing themselves while exalting troubadour and trouvère models; over-refined until they became finical, often full of false delicacy. In the list of court-epic poets are found, however, men of genius, and there are critics who place some of them in the highest position. Any consideration of the literature of the period would be quite inadequate which should fail to give them extended mention.

Three contemporaries are the great names among the writers of the Court Epics, — Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Strassburg, and Wolfram von Eschenbach.¹ Hartmann, who died in 1220, is reckoned among the older Minnesingers; he was a soldier of Barbarossa in his expedition to the Holy Land. He was a man of noble birth and active

¹ Koberstein.

habits, who regarded his poetic fame with some contempt, writing his verses only as a pastime, when, as he says, he had nothing better to do. It has been mentioned that it is impossible to make a sharp distinction between the Court and Popular Poetry, and now, in considering Hartmann, the difficulty of drawing the line appears. His rank and associations brought him into connection with the class of nobles, and for them he wrote; but his best and most famous piece is thoroughly national in its subject, and treated in a manner most simple and natural. The title of the poem is "Poor Henry."¹ A rich knight, Heinrich von Aue, is attacked by leprosy. Despairing of cure, he goes nevertheless to Salerno, the reputation of whose school of medicine was unbounded during the Middle Ages, where a wise physician tells him that he can only be healed through the blood of a pure maid who devotes herself freely to death in his behalf. Robbed of all hope, he returns home, where he gives away his property and withdraws to a little farm; this a peasant manages, who, through Heinrich's kindness, has won great success. The farmer cherishes him faithfully, aided by his wife, but particularly by his daughter, a tender girl of twelve. She is continually with the knight, relieving his pain through her hearty sympathy and love, so that he can no longer live without her, and in sport calls her his little wife. After three years she learns by chance the means through which alone her lord can be

¹ Der arme Heinrich.

saved, and immediately concludes to sacrifice her life for him. All the entreaties of her parents are useless. The generous Heinrich refuses her offer, but is at last won by her entreaties, and the knight and the maid travel together to Salerno. She there repeats before the physician that she voluntarily offers herself to death. The salvation of her own soul, however, is always the uppermost motive. The physician is already preparing the knife for the sacrifice, when Heinrich, overpowered by the dreadful thought, forbids the murder. He returns to Swabia in company with the maid, who at first feels very unhappy at the failure of her intention. But because the knight has humbled himself before God, with whose decree he has until now constantly striven, on account of his misfortunes, he recovers from his sickness, and becomes united with the maid in marriage.¹

It is in many points a sweet and simple story, — the same used by Longfellow in the *Golden Legend*. It is wrought out by the Minnesinger with great tenderness, touching always the heart of the world, and finding often imitation. If looked at closely, however, the maid's nobleness is far enough from being of the highest. She is not self-forgetful. The judgment of one of the best of critics² will not seem too severe. The child goes forward to her death, not so much from compassion as from the idea that the sacrifice will bring to pass the sav-

¹ Pfeiffer u. Bartsch: *Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters*.

² Gervinus.

ing of her own soul. When, after being under the knife and then preserved, she despairs of this,—when she wishes to be free from the holiest bonds of nature, from father and mother,—in order so much the quicker to share the eternal life, our sympathy does not follow her.

Gottfried von Strassburg, the second of the three, is a writer of great elegance and delicacy, although he was not so far above the influences that surrounded him as to be kept always from an absurd over-refinement. He will not speak of sickness or the medicine necessary to relieve it, considering such topics as too full of unpleasant suggestion to be introduced before a courtier circle. The poem through which he has become known,—“Tristan and Isolde,”—in matter and treatment, is based on French originals. The subject, moreover,—the illicit love of the hero and heroine,—is hardly moral. Tristan is represented as wooing Isolde for his master, a king. The suit is successful; but while the squire conducts the bride to her destination, through a love potion which they drink together, supposing it to be wine, their hearts become united, and a clandestine relation, following through many years, is the result,—described in long detail. The objectionable features of the story are so far modified that they cease, in great part, to be repulsive, and although Gottfried is only an imitator, his genius is great enough to secure for him a noble fame.¹

¹ Pfeiffer u. Bartsch: Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters.

Greatest, however, among the writers of the Court Epics is Wolfram von Eschenbach. He was a man of knightly birth, although poor; a zealous worker, although he does not scruple to confess that he values his rank more highly than his poetic gift. Three long epics—Parzival, Titurel, and Willehalm—have come down from him (Titurel and Willehalm in fragmentary shape), an accomplishment quite wonderful, since he could neither read nor write,—elaborating in rapt mood his long-drawn strophes, then dictating them to a scribe. The Parzival is the masterpiece, and the only work we need to consider.

In the Parzival, Wolfram combines the legends connected with the Holy Grail with the Breton stories relating to Arthur and the Round Table,—material whose charm is imperishable. Deep in the ideas of gray antiquity,¹ in the myths of the Orient, cradle of humanity, is rooted the legend of a place on the earth where, untouched by sin and all distress of life, mortals should reach the fulness of tireless enjoyment,—a spot where wishes are silent because satisfied, where hopes rest because fulfilled, where the thirst for knowledge is stilled, and the peace of the soul in no way suffers disturbance,—the legend of “The Earthly Paradise.” As this paradise, in the consciousness of later men, retreated more and more, a relic remained behind from it,—something conceived of as a costly vessel, from which all the blessings of Heaven might pour them-

¹ Vilmar.

selves upon the earth. The legends connected with the vessel the deep spirit of the Middle Ages caught, although springing up on heathen ground; then developed them into Christian mythology, in which the idea of salvation through Christ received a poetic and symbolical form. A costly stone of wonderful splendor—so says the Christian myth—was wrought into a chalice, and became the possession of Joseph of Arimathea. From this chalice, Christ, on the night of his betrayal, reached his body to his disciples; into it, moreover, when the soldier, Longinus, had opened with his spear the side of the crucified one, was received that blood which flowed for the salvation of the world. This vessel, with which the saving of the world, through the sacrifice of Christ, was so closely connected, in the mediæval legend became endowed with supernatural powers. Wherever it was kept and cherished, it was believed to afford the richest abundance of blessings. Whoever looked upon it, even though he should be sick unto death, could not die the same week. Whoever, with pure spirit, continually beheld it did not grow old, and at last passed into the great beyond without the death-struggle. This vessel—the symbol of salvation in Christ—was called the Holy Grail, to be the guardian and cherisher of which was the highest dignity of humanity. Only the humblest, truest, and chastest were worthy of the honor, for the guardianship implied a spiritual chivalry of the noblest kind. There must be lowliness and purity, as well as the strongest and boldest manhood; there must be fidelity toward

God and toward women, — self-renunciation, tranquil simplicity, the highest wisdom.

The first chief of these Knights of the Holy Grail, or “*Tempeleisen*,” as they were called, with a reference to the Templars of the Crusades, was *Titurel*, a legendary king of Anjou. He was filled with religious chivalry, and had never felt earthly love for woman. To this stainless knight angels came, bringing the Grail, that it might be guarded. It was borne to *Salva Terra*, in Biscaya, where *Titurel* built upon *Montsalvage*, the unapproachable mountain, a castle for his knights and a shrine for the relic. Here it hovered unsupported in the air, and ruled the order of the *Tempeleisen*. At times, in a supernatural way, commands appeared as a gleaming inscription on the vessel’s edge. Every Good Friday a white dove was seen flying thitherward to lay a holy wafer within the Grail, through which its power was renewed.

The splendor of the temple is painted glowingly by a disciple of Wolfram — *Albrecht von Scharfenberg*. The surface of the mountain was of onyx, so polished that it shone like the moon. Hereon was drawn by the hand of God the plan of the castle and the temple. The temple was a vast dome, surrounded by chapels; these, in turn, surmounted by towers. There were pillars of bronze, adorned with gold and pearls. There were arches of sapphire, and in the midst an emerald, whereon was enamelled a lamb, with the banner of the cross. The altar, moreover, was sapphire, — a type of the annihilation of sin, — and in its ornaments all precious

stones were united. A diamond and a topaz presented the sun and moon, so that by night the interior sparkled in wonderful splendor. The windows were of beryl and crystal, adorned with paintings, to assuage the burning glow; the floor, of crystal, clear as water. Upon the temple's pinnacle was a mighty carbuncle, which beamed at night — a beacon to the Knights of the Grail — far into the thick wood of cypresses and cedars, into which no one could come uncalled. When at length the world grew godless, the temple was carried off bodily by angels.¹

This picturesque and splendid legend, which perhaps received first its Christian form in Spain, and was afterwards developed in France and Germany, fascinated thoroughly the spirit of Wolfram. Dreaming over it in the castle of the Wartburg, where he lived and sang for many years, protected by the landgrave of Thuringia, he blended with it the not less interesting Celtic legend of Arthur. There is no need to detail this. The greatest of the poets of to-day has made familiar as household words the names of Arthur and Guinevere, of Gawain and Galahad; of Carleon, where gathered the court, and the wood of Broceliande, whither the knights rode in quest of adventure. The same traditions, gathered by Geoffrey of Monmouth, long ago, among the Celtic minstrels, passing the sea to inspire first the old Provençal singers, carried to many lands, and alive in many ages even until now, thrilled the

¹ Bibliothek der deutschen Klassiker.

spirit of that knight in the solitary Thuringian fastness, and there he wrought toward a noble and beautiful result.

Wolfram's work is variously judged. Though full of grace, it is certainly of wearisome length, and so entangled with episode and incident that to give the story, even in abstract, is far from easy. Parzival, the hero, spends his youth isolated from the world, of whose ways he learns nothing. A high yearning drives him forth to adventures. The guardianship of the Holy Grail has been destined for him; he reaches Mōntsalvage and beholds its splendor, but, in ignorance, misses his destiny. Purified and exercised in long trials, in his manly ripeness he becomes capable of the sublime office, attaining at last the Grail and the highest bliss.¹ I find the Parzival characterized as a psychological epic, representing the purifying of a soul through battle with the world and itself. A mystic symbolism runs through it, such as belongs to the writers of the "Romantic School," a class to be hereafter considered, who flourished in the first years of the nineteenth century, and whom Wolfram surprisingly resembles. Taking the story of Arthur as a type of cheerful worldly life, connecting it with the story of the Grail, a symbol of spiritual life, he illustrates the parallels and contrasts of the two directions. So he sought to penetrate into the depths of the spiritual world and find mystical relations, losing himself sometimes in a haze of unintelligibility.

¹ Wackernagel.

Yet it is right to say that he surpasses all the poets of his class in fulness and depth of thought; that he possesses a noble moral earnestness, a fine sensibility toward things high and beautiful, the most humane impulses. Many a page is radiant with poetic splendor. The "Romantic School," in modern times, has accorded to him the highest praise, its founder and leader¹ calling him the greatest of German poets.

Arriving at Eisenach from the north, I spent the night at the "Anker," and in the morning of a bright July day went out for my first view of the Wartburg. There it hung, upon the summit of the swelling hill, six hundred feet above the town, the winding path—trodden by such multitudes of historic men—leading to it through the forest. There, in 1817, met the high-hearted German youth, assembling from the universities to demand of the temporizing princes of the Holy Alliance the fulfilment of their pledges,—pledges made in the great "Freedom War," to win the help of the people, and which, now that the end was gained, they had no desire to fulfil. Up this path again, three hundred years before, hurried the friendly captors of great Martin Luther, with pretended roughness halting their prisoner to the stronghold, there to reveal themselves to him, and bolt out in his behalf a hostile world, which reached for faggots to burn him. And, in a still older time, down the hill walked, on errands of mercy, the beautiful Saint

¹ Friedrich Schlegel.

Elizabeth of Hungary, — loveliest of saints, perhaps all the more attractive for her naive insincerities, in which, according to the story, Heaven was her ally. There are these associations, and others as interesting, — none finer, however, than this: That the court here of the Landgrave Hermann, in the Hohenstauffen days, more than any spot of that world perhaps, was a centre of light; the castle hall ringing ever with the sound of minstrelsy, the portcullis ever rising to admit the wandering singer, the hospitable roof sheltering many a busy brain, elaborating lyric and romance. In my pilgrimage I climbed the path to the castle, magnificent to-day as ever, for its princely owner has restored it entirely in the ancient taste. I stood in the hall in which the knights banqueted, where so much of the mediæval poetry had its first rehearsal, after the flagons were filled, the landgrave and his knights sitting attentive. On the wall was painted the strife of the Minnesingers, of which, says the legend, the hall was the scene, — the song-battle, in which the conquered were to suffer death, — the figures of the Hungarian minstrel Klingsor, of Heinrich von Ofterdingen, and Wolfram von Eschenbach looking from the fresco into the broad spaces that had really known their figures in life. Where was it among the nooks of the castle that Wolfram dreamed and dictated? No one can tell the precise spot, but I could be sure, as from the castle height my eye went forth over Thuringia, — the wooded hills heaving high, now and then from the valley a flash of light from a blue

stream, upon isolated peaks here and there a crumbling tower,—that it was this landscape which refreshed him, and which he wrought into his poem.

I climbed down from the castle by a mountain road into the pleasant Anna-thal, crossing the Coburg highway; then through the ravine of the dragon, into the woodlands beyond. Turning among the thickets, I got my farewell glimpse of the Wartburg, at a distance of several miles. The foliage was dense, but through a circular break appeared, high in the air, the summit of the rock, and the Wartburg, rising from it, relieved against the heavens. The green in which the view was framed cut off from the vision all connection with the earth; the distance was great enough to soften all outlines, veiling with summer haze the lofty walls, till they seemed mysterious and almost spiritual. Buttress, bastion, and high-soaring tower,—held for the moment in the blue bosom of the heavens, indistinct through a league of intervening vapory atmosphere,—seen when the heart was touched by the multitude of memories! So upon Montsalvage, before the eye of some aspiring knight, might have towered the shrine of the Holy Grail, and the home of that troop of chivalry who were set apart, through pure-minded manhood, to be its guardians!



CHAPTER VI.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROSE.


There is no spot in Germany where a pilgrim feels so strongly the might and majesty of the mediæval emperors as in the cathedral of Speyer. Its corner-stone was laid in 1030, by the Emperor Konrad I., and it became in succeeding years the scene of a large part of what was most brilliant and important in the world. Here kings plighted faith to their queens; here Peter the Hermit preached the Crusade; here came popes from Rome to give dignity to coronations. In its crypts were buried eight emperors. Their graves, to be sure, have been desecrated, and the roof above them burned, by the vandal armies of Louis XIV.; but in our century an art-loving king has restored the ruin to more than its old splendor.

One day I passed into the city of Speyer through a picturesque gateway, high above which rose an ancient watch-tower, then along a modern street, at the end of which was the cathedral front. Through the rounded arch that formed the portal I stepped into the vestibule, and found myself in an august presence-chamber. Before me rose, in imposing presentment, the forms of the emperors who were here laid to rest. They stood in the armor of their



time, or girt about by robes of state,—majestic figures, with faces of power. From here opened the long perspective of the nave, beautiful indeed! The columns followed one another in a gigantic line, arching over at the top into mighty circles. Upon the walls were thrown frescoes made splendid with scarlet and gold. The light streamed in abundantly, till I was bewildered with the multiplied scenes and the glory of the color. Passing onward, I stood presently in the main choir, treading upon a pavement inlaid with the “Reichs-adler”—the imperial eagle. Two statues were on either hand; the one to the right represented Rudolph of Hapsburg, sitting throned and crowned, with the insignia of rule in his hand, his face turned toward the high altar; the one to the left was Adolph of Nassau—a warrior in complete armor, kneeling with folded palms, the face also turned toward the high altar. It is said that he lost his life in battle because he refused to wear his helmet; so in the marble figure the head is bared, with countenance full of manly grace. Right and left swept the arms of the transept, between them the gorgeous depth of the chancel, the spaces among the lofty pillars everywhere aflame with the utmost the painter’s hand could work,—not a panel without its adoring figure,—the wings of angels spread abroad in the vaults of the lofty ceiling. Below, in the crypt, I saw the effigy of Rudolph of Hapsburg, cut six hundred years ago, by an artist who took face and figure from life.

And now I stood with a congregation of hundreds gathered for the vesper service. Through the flash-



ing arches sounded the music of the organ ; the priest intoned his prayers, and knelt in his rich robes ; from the censers arose the smoke of incense. At one side knelt a company of nuns, their heads bent toward the altar, and their hands folded ; just in front, the figure of Adolph of Nassau, with its folded palms, seemed to be at one with the worshippers. From the doorway, at length, I cast a parting glance backward. The fume of the incense still made dim the vaults of the ceiling ; the low afternoon sun still shone on the halos of the martyrs and the white robes of the virgins ; in the vestibule towered the great figures of the emperors, some mailed and sworded, some crowned and sceptred,—the stamp of power on the brow, a fine energy in every limb. So stand the great kaisers of the past in the spot that once knew their forms so well, to which, after their wild battle with the elements of disorder about them, they were borne at last for the final rest.

In the cathedral at Speyer the student of history asks himself the question whether the men whose figures rise before him,—tenfold more impressive in the great awakening which his soul has undergone, touched by all the superb surrounding circumstance,—whether they really were so great, deserving of such splendid commemoration. Looking attentively at the story of their deeds, many of them deserve to be represented to us clothed with majesty,—Karl the Great, Henry the Fowler, some of his descendants in the great Saxon line that followed him, several of the Franconian line, the Hohen-

stauffen, Rudolph of Hapsburg ; among all the rulers whom the earth has seen, there are none more clearly born to command than these. The greatest of them made mistakes ; their rule was often harmful rather than beneficial, but they were men of might. They suffered sometimes from the very excess of energy. Germany, even to our own time, offers an instructive example of the folly of attempting too much. Karl the Great overreached himself in attempting to comprehend within a single empire an extent of country so vast, inhabited by populations so different in speech and character. His successors followed too closely his precedent, and especially brought woe upon their native land, for which they wished and sought the best, by striving for the subjugation of Italy. The manhood and resources of Germany were wasted in struggles with Italian princes or confederated cities. The emperors, to gain support, indispensable in their difficult undertakings, as time went on, increased too much the power of their feudatories. The land grew weak and waste, because its strength was lavished abroad ; at length those who came to the purple were confronted by vassals nearly or quite as powerful as themselves, toward whom must be used the language of suitor or dependent, rather than that of master. The result was, at length, an utter disintegration of the realm.

An observer writing in our own time, just before the unifying work of Bismarck had begun to make itself felt, remarks : “ The traveller in Central Germany is annoyed to find every hour or two, by the change in the soldiers’ uniforms and the color of

the stripes on the railway fences, that he has passed out of one and into another of its miniature kingdoms. Much more surprised and embarrassed would he have been a century ago, when, instead of the present thirty-seven, there were three hundred petty principalities between the Alps and the Baltic, each with its own laws, its own courts, in which the ceremonious pomp of Versailles was fully reproduced; its little armies, its separate coinage, its tolls and custom-houses on the frontier, its crowd of meddling and pedantic officials, presided over by a prime minister who was generally the unworthy favorite of his prince and the pensioner of some foreign court. This system paralyzed the trade, literature, and political thought of Germany.”¹

The generation now upon the stage will remember that the school-map of Germany studied in their childhood seemed to be afflicted with a disfiguring eruption, to such an extent was it covered with minute, variously-colored spots. This unwholesomeness was the symptom of one of the worst diseases that can attack the body politic,—a trouble for which the English language has no name, but which the Germans call “Particularismus,” “Vielstaaterei,”—the disintegration of a people, through weakness in the national spirit, into a multitude of small sections, each sovereign, or nearly so, of the kind described in the foregoing quotation. No race has suffered so much from “Particularismus” as the Germans. The inroads of the disease were gradual,

¹ Bryce: The Holy Roman Empire.

until at length, at the peace of Westphalia, in 1648, it reached its worst. Several successive maps in the great historical series of Spruner have the appearance of pathological charts. The complexion of Karl the Great's vast empire was clear; but soon spots innumerable appear, of all colors and shapes, which, when examined in the fine print which the number and minuteness make necessary, prove to be principalities, bishoprics, countships, abbacies, and what-nots, that have broken out among electorates, grand-duchies, circles,—what-nots of a larger sort. In each map the unwholesomeness varies, Germany in the time of the strong dynasties—the Saxons, the Franconians, the Hohenstauffen—being clear, but at last developing a most unsightly tetter.

As the days of the Hohenstauffen draw to a close, in the thirteenth century, a power was developing itself in Germany which, if the emperors had been far-seeing enough to use it, would have secured to them their might, and perhaps averted the disintegration whose consequences became so sad. It was not at first that the wandering Teutons could bring themselves to forsake their nomad life to become dwellers in cities; but during the tenth century, what had been originally fortresses or trading and mission stations were enlarging and changing their character. Those who had assembled for temporary protection found it convenient to remain in the shelter; the people newly Christianized naturally collected about the church; the merchants, no longer wanderers, became fixed at convenient points. Civilization brought new demands, and in



the spots where population was beginning to centre sprung up the work-shops necessary to satisfy them. The consciousness grew rapidly in the minds of the people that, banded together and fenced in by a substantial wall, they were far safer than in isolation; that there was a richness too in social life, in this way made possible, that the solitary could not enjoy.

No sooner had the cities begun to gain strength than they showed a spirit of independence which made them hated by the nobles, now sinking toward barbarism. These watched jealously from their robber-castles, which stood on every prominent height, the progress of the sturdy burghers. The emperors were often great men, deserving to be remembered with reverence, to be commemorated magnificently,—as in the cathedral at Speyer,—but they were not wise enough to see in these cities their proper allies, and by striking hands with them to crush between them the power of the nobles that threatened both. After Rudolph of Hapsburg, from the end of the thirteenth century, a change for the worse appears in the potentates. Few come to power who are not either weak or bent upon selfish aggrandizement; and so the land goes forward into that wretched distraction which, by dissipating, so weakened its strength,—the “*Vielstaate-rei*,” which has only just come to an end.

We must not occupy ourselves with any discussion of the political significance of the cities. They have, however, an important relation to the development of literature, and that we must con-

sider. Rudolph of Hapsburg, as he lies in effigy in the crypt of the cathedral of Speyer, has the face and form of a man born to command, — and command he did, — but found no leisure, perhaps had no inclination, to follow the precedent of Barbarossa and Friedrich II., in patronizing the singers. The songs in which the degenerating minstrels cursed him are still extant; one of them is that of the school-master of Esslingen, a line or two of which was given in the preceding chapter. At Rudolph's death the powers of disorder were sadly rife; and, besides, floods, the Black Death, famine, produced in the world a terrible gloom. The young cities, stoutly walled in, and with burghers as ready and skilful at wielding bow and spear as at the anvil and loom, fenced out, in part, the devouring calamity. To them — now that the monks and priests were sinking into sloth and ignorance, and the chivalry becoming little better than wolves — literature at length turned. The first period of bloom of German poetry comes to an end with the thirteenth century. Now at length comes the development of prose, which always follows that of poetry. It began in the cities; the first prose was intended for the class of burghers; with the beginnings of German prose no place is so closely associated as Strassburg, and in Strassburg the cathedral.

Coming from the direction of the Schwarzwald to the ramparts of Kehl, the traveller crosses the Rhine, still flowing cold from its Alpine source, then presently passes through a gate in a bastion of the great fortress. The streets are often narrow,



the houses piled high with steep roofs, showing row on row of quaint dormer windows. The population lives, in good part, under the very ridge-poles ; for the pressure of its armed girdle has forced the city somewhat unnaturally into the air. In the streets it is the German speech that one hears, and the old Alsatian dress that one sees ; while one cannot remain in the city long without becoming aware of quaint customs and institutions transmitted from the Alemanni,¹ who in the days of Julian crossed the Rhine and built the city. Through an avenue of houses, rather toppling under the weight of upper stories too many and too large, one approaches the cathedral. A telescope almost is necessary to catch fairly the rose on the top of the spire, and a microscope to disentangle the infinite maze of the tracery which is spun before it from pinnacle to pavement. The solidity of wall and buttress is veiled by a drapery of gossamer, in weaving which the chisel assumed the function of the shuttle.

In the bright light of noon I went into the interior. The walls of the cathedral of Speyer fairly flashed in the cheerful light with their gold and color. The sombre columns of the Strassburg minster, on the other hand, rose upward in a softened light. The windows were full of richly stained glass,—placed by the hands of mediæval workmen,—which dimmed the blaze of the sun, and set before the eye the forms of apostles, martyrs,

¹ Oscar Schwebel : *Historische Bilder aus dem Elsass.*

saints. The great aisles were dusky, and through them sounded the organ, answering the chant of a rich-voiced priest. As in Speyer, the vestments glittered before a decorated altar, and the smoke of the incense ascended among the arches. Climbing up to the great platform, I saw from within, and near at hand, how the stones were placed, — what pains the builders had taken. I heard and felt the pulsation of the clock, then the boom and throb of the cathedral bell as it tolled the hour. Far away from the city the eye ranged over the fields of Alsace and the plain of the Rhine, framed in between the Vosges and the Schwarzwald. Lines of poplars and blossoming fruit-trees marked the highways; embossed upon the plain, lay around the city the long lines of entrenchment, like an intricate pattern of chenille embroidery, out from which wandered the stream into meadows overhung by the warm spring vapor. But I love to remember the cathedral best as I saw it from the distant plain in which Turenne was slain, whence, at the distance of a league or two, its towering mass subdued the city and the landscape; and the spire, with the light showing everywhere through its substance, hovered on the horizon like a beautiful ghost. The men that built it have been dead four hundred years, but they survive there by their genius, which is still concrete, visible, unexorcised.¹

No prose has come down to us from any knightly


¹ "Voyez quelle immobilité, quelle durée les mortels peuvent donner à leurs oeuvres, tandis qu'eux-mêmes ils passent si rapidement et ne se survivent que par le génie!" — Madame de Staël.

author who lived during the period of bloom in poetry. There is none from any source written in German until we come to the last half of the fourteenth century, when the father of German history appears in Fritsche Closener, a canon of Strassburg cathedral. His work is a chronicle relating mainly to Strassburg, written to be read by the burghers of the city. It is often dry; sometimes, however, vivid and warm, and always terse and clear. He describes the terrible pestilence of the fourteenth century, the burnings of the Jews in the towns along the Rhine, and, in general, more gloom than joy, reflecting the despondent temper of his time. "Two hundred flagellants," he says, "brethren of the scourge, came in 1349 to Strassburg. They marched into the town two and two abreast, chanting a lamentation, and carrying banners and lighted candles, while as they came into the town the bells of the cathedral were tolled. When they entered a church, they first all kneeled down and chanted a hymn. Then, extending their arms and making themselves so many likenesses of the cross, they all fell at once, with a loud clapping sound, upon the pavement. Twice a day, early and late, they publicly scourged themselves with knotted cords, and this was their fashion of doing it: The bells of the cathedral were tolled as they marched, two and two abreast, out of the town into the open field. There, having stripped themselves to the waist, they lay down on the grass so as to form a wide circle, and each brother, by his mode of lying down, confessed the chief sin of which he had been guilty. Then they arose, and

while they were singing the brethren went around in a ring, and scourged their naked backs until the blood flowed freely from many of them.”¹ Closener farther narrates the impression made by the flagellants, stating facts which indicate that society was weighed down by deep depression.

The work of Closener was continued by Königs-hoven, also a canon of the cathedral. More interesting, however, than the chroniclers are certain noble men whose eloquent words addressed to the people, — often, without doubt, from the cathedral pulpit, — have in part survived to our day. No instrument employed by the Church of Rome has stood in worse repute than the order of Saint Dominic; but even when the Dominicans were most active, establishing the Inquisition, and persecuting with most intolerance heretics, some of the noblest men of the time stood within their ranks. In Italy, Savonarola announced political and religious freedom; and in Germany the men came from their number who continued the work of Master Eckhardt, the pure and wise spirit who, in the thirteenth century, founded the “Mystics.” Eckhardt and his followers took advantage of the unfortunate times to lead, so far as they could, the world back to spiritual things. They held the biblical stories to be symbols within which a finer meaning lurked. They sought union with God, not from an external grace, arbitrarily applied, but from the inner power of man himself. By self-renunciation they sought

¹ Gostwick and Harrison: *Outlines of German Literature*.



to become at one with the Deity, and in their aspiration were carried away sometimes into extravagance. They yearned to sink themselves in the ocean of Divinity, saw things in visions as wonderful as John in Patmos, and were sometimes thrown into convulsions. The order which resulted from their teaching was called "The Friends of God;" they sought to lead men to a purer life, without separation from the Church.

Most interesting among "The Friends of God" was the spiritual hero, Tauler, born at Strassburg, probably in 1290. He wandered from his native city, but returned again, spending there his most fruitful years, and dying in 1361. The order regarded him as their inspired master. As a preacher he was nobly eloquent; though banned by the Church, and everywhere in danger of his life, he was a light in the world. His followers believed him endowed with miraculous power; Luther, two hundred years later, studied him ceaselessly; and even now men of the widest divergence in creed are attracted to his words by their beautiful spirit. In his sermons, and also his hymns, which were full of a mystical spirit, Tauler taught that man, resigning his personality, must sink himself in God, to find himself in God again. Yet his manliness kept him from the sentimentalism which led his followers sometimes into unfortunate extremes. No man of his age did a nobler work; and it is one of the finest associations of the Strassburg cathedral that it must sometimes have heard his words. But Tauler was not alone. Though the ecclesiastics were, to a

large extent, sunk in ignorance and held in contempt, the mendicant orders, full of sympathy for the people, travelled through the land, preaching now in cathedrals, now before chapels in outer pulpits, now on a mountain, now under a green linden in the outskirts of a village. Berthold of Regensburg, the most famous of them, sometimes addressed crowds of many thousands, with a power which his transmitted words still preserve. The name of Geiler of Kaisersberg brings us back again to Strassburg. When Tauler had been dead a hundred years, this new preacher appears in the places that had once known the great mystic,—to some extent the heir both of his eloquence and worth. He was buried, at length, beneath the pulpit from which he had spoken.

The class of nobles — who, after the decline of the minnesong, sank below all refined enjoyment — now and then furnished a representative who has left some record of himself. Goetz von Berlichingen, close upon the Reformation, in a rude narrative, details artlessly his freebooting adventures as if they were innocent pastime. The name has little interest in itself; Göthe, however, making use of the account, constructed, long afterward, his first drama. A worthier type was Ulrich von Hutten, the precursor, and for a time the contemporary, of Luther. Though mainly known for his Latin writings, at length he expressed himself boldly in his mother tongue. His influence was important in the world of action rather than of letters. The Peasants' War might have resulted less disastrously had he lived to

guide it. It was in its political, more than religious, aspect that he valued the Reformation; and could his influence have remained, the movement might have become broader and more beneficent. The cause lost, however, not only a strong arm, but an influential pen, when the stout knight too early found his grave in the island of Ufenau, in the lake of Zürich.

At the other end of the social scale the peasantry in these times first find a voice in the collection of rude jokes attributed to Tyll Eulenspiegel, a character who may have had a real existence. The jests were collected no one can say precisely when or how; their popularity was immense, and they reflect perfectly the tastes and manners of the class among which they took their origin.

From the close of the thirteenth century to the time of Luther, German prose literature is but meagre. As will be presently seen, in poetry also the accomplishment is no more respectable. It must not be supposed that the minds of men had ceased to be active. On a pedestal in a square of the city of Frankfort stand three figures, in mediæval dress, on the spot where they labored, the men among whom is to be divided the credit of the invention,—perhaps the most important ever made,—Faust, Gutenberg, and Scheffer. In Mainz the introduction of printing has a similar commemoration; and Strassburg, again, with as good grounds probably as the rival cities, claims to be the birth-place of the great art, and honors its parentage in superb bronze. In each city the houses are stand-

ing which one or all of the men must have entered, which echoed to the rattle of the early printing-presses. We cannot at all despise an age when the human mind so pressed for utterance that the printing-press was forced into being, and after its coming was kept so busy. In these years the revival of learning—beginning in Italy—was passing into the north of Europe, and many a patient scholastic was perplexing himself with fine-spun speculations, or disputing in the newly-founded universities upon subtleties ingeniously absurd. Here and there were springing up the universities,—as Paris, Heidelberg, Prague, Padua, Salerno. From all countries youths desirous of learning flocked to these; a common language became a necessity; hence Latin as the vernacular of the learned world. It was inevitable and sad that in this way the people were shut out from culture. In Germany the scholars and thinkers turned their backs upon the mother tongue, which came to be considered as fit only for vulgar uses. The songs of the Minnesingers, the great chivalric and heroic epics, were forgotten; the parchments which contained them vanished under accumulating dust in the libraries, not to be disentombed until our own day. In the estimation of the scholars, Latin alone was the language for literature, who reserved German only for the servant and the beast. Of this mediæval Latin literature, emanating from German brains, there is enough and to spare. There are many illustrious names; since, however, they scorned their native speech, he who tells the story



of German literature can make no account of them.

The invention of printing has not been an un-mixed benefit to the world ; its effect upon poetry has been to injure it. The death of all true and living poetry, it has been said,¹ must come when it ceases to be recited. Neither Iliad nor Odyssey, neither Nibelungen Lied nor Gudrun, could have come to pass in a time of printers. The perishing of heroic poetry may be said to take place in proportion to the spread of the press. A man may be sometimes found who can read silently a score of music, and through power of imagination make so real to himself the tones that he scarcely needs to touch the instrument. Such cases are, however, rare. Dumb music is an anomaly ; if instrument and voice were silent, the world would know little of melody. It is somewhat similar with poetry. In a silent reading of a poem we make partly real to ourselves, by an effort of the imagination, the harmony which it possesses ; but how much more vivid is the realization if to the rhyme of the poet the beauty of a voice is lent ! In the old day the poem became known only through the chant of the minstrel. We receive it now through the eye,—the easier, but infinitely poorer, method ; bereft thus of its most important charm, it becomes less dear to the souls of men.

The only genuine poetry of the times to which we have now come is that of the volks-lied, or ballad,

¹ Vilmar.

which sprung up, in the ancient way, among those who could neither read nor write. Of these fine old songs, many, through the influence of Herder, Göthe, Bürger, and Uhland, have become known and appreciated. The *Boy's Wonder-Horn* of Achim von Arnim is a collection of them, in part modernized, but with the primitive aroma not banished.

The *volks-lied*, however, comprises but a small part of the verse that was now written. Since the cities had displaced the courts as centres of culture, the poetry, for the most part, was designed to suit the burghers, whose earnest taste sought teaching and admonition, rather than amusement. In particular the satire flourished, since the world was filled with a sense of its unworthiness,—a compunction of conscience due in great part to the calamitous times, which seemed to have been sent for a punishment. As so often in dealing with this period, for the memorable names we go to Strassburg. Sebastian Brant, town clerk of the city, in the fifteenth century wrote a poem called the “*Ship of Fools*,” in which, a party of fools being represented as setting sail from Strassburg down the Rhine, an opportunity is given for the delineation of various species of folly. To us the poem is most tedious, but its popularity in its time was unbounded,—Geiler of Kaisersberg preaching more than one hundred sermons on texts taken from its lines. Brant was an exemplary teacher and scholar, but his contemporary, Thomas Murner, was a spirit far wilder, and at the same time more inter-



esting. Born within the shadow of the newly-finished spire, Strassburg nourished him also; but he became a wandering monk. Traversing Germany as a buffoon-preacher, ragged, rejected from cities that were full of the spirit of the Reformation, of unflinching courage, — or impudence, — he lashed at first his fellow-monks with vituperation, then flung scorn upon Luther, whom he sharply and insolently scourged as he rose into fame. His best satire — the best of the time — is called, “Of the Great Lutheran Fool, as Dr. Murner has Exorcised Him.” The *Heldenbuch* of Kaspar von der Roen echoes the songs of a past time, giving them in elaborations of inferior merit. Far better is a new version of *Reynard the Fox*.

The beginning of the German drama is shrouded in darkness; the first name clearly associated with its history is that of Hroswitha, a nun of the abbey of Gandersheim, who, in the tenth century, adapted Latin plays for performance in the monastery. As the light grows clearer, it is the Church which appears as the especial patron of the drama. The monks — partly with the idea of instructing the people, partly to amuse them — turned the Bible history, from Genesis to Revelation, into miracle-plays, performing them more frequently than not in the cathedrals, upon a towering, three-storied stage, representing Heaven, Earth, and Hell. With the biblical stories were often combined Rabbinical tales, — indeed, material from any source. With incongruity — which must be regarded as artlessness, and not intentional

irreverence—the sacred and profane are often thrust into the rudest contact. Deity and angels figure side by side with men and brutes, and the devil is the butt of all. Little by little, in the fourteenth century, a secular drama—less profane than the so-called sacred drama—takes its rise; Hans Folz, a barber, and Hans Rosenblut, sometimes called the first of the Mastersingers, writing their wild and coarse¹ Shrove Tuesday plays. In connection with the secular drama of the period, these remain the best-known names.

Again, in the universities and schools the students performed sometimes classic works, sometimes plays written by themselves or their teachers. At Worms, I remember, in the Luther memorial, the superb figure of Reuchlin on one of the outer corners. One or two of the statues may be somewhat grander, but no other seemed to me so handsome, as it stood colossal on its pillar, the scholar's gown falling from the stately shoulders, and the face so fine there in the bronze, under the abundant hair and cap. Reuchlin is said to be the proper founder of the German drama. Before his time there had been, to be sure, miracle-plays, and perhaps things of a different sort. The German literary historians, however, make it an era when Reuchlin came as professor to Heidelberg, and in 1497 set up a stage, with students for actors, at the house of Johann, Kämmerer von Dalberg. He wrote his plays in Latin. Each act, probably, was prefaced by a synopsis in Ger-

¹ Fastnacht Spiele.

man, and soon translations came into vogue, and were performed as well. On that little strip of level which the crags and the Neckar make so narrow, collected then, as now, a fair concourse of bounding youth. One can easily fancy how, when the prototypes of the trim Burschen of to-day stepped out in their representation, the applause sounded across to the vineyards about the Heiligenberg and Hirschgasse, and how now and then a knight and a dame from the court of the Kurfürst came down the Schlossberg to see it all. What Reuchlin began, came by no means to a speedy end. In the Jesuit seminaries in Germany, in Italy too, and elsewhere, as the Reformation came on, I find the boys were acting plays. This feature in the school was held out as an attraction to win students ; and in Prague the fathers themselves wrote dramas to satirize the Protestants, introducing Luther as the comic figure. But what occurred in the Protestant world was more noteworthy. As the choral singing of the school-boys affected, in an important way, the development of music, so the school-plays had much to do with the development of the drama. Gervinus says that for a century or two it was the schools and universities that remained true to a tolerably high standard, while in the world at large all nobler ideals were under eclipse. It was jocund Luther himself who took it under his especial sanction, as he did the fiddle and the dance, in his sweet large-heartedness finding scriptural precedents for it, and encouraging the youths who came trooping to Wittenberg to relieve their wrestling with Aristotle and the dreary

controversy with an occasional play. Melancthon too gave the practice encouragement, until not only Wittenberg, but the schools of Saxony in general, and Thuringia, whose hills were in sight, surpassed all the countries of Germany in their attention to plays. In Leipsic, Erfurt, and Magdeburg comedies were regularly represented before the school-masters. But it was at the University of Strassburg, even at the time when the unsmiling Calvin was seeking asylum there, that the dramatic life of the German seminaries found a splendid culmination. Yearly in the academic theatre took place a series of representations, by students, of marvellous pomp and elaboration.

The school and college-plays were of various character. Sometimes they were from Terence, Plautus, or Aristophanes; sometimes modifications of the ancient mysteries, meant to enforce the evangelical theology; sometimes comedies full of the contemporary life. There are several men that have earned mention in the history of German literature by writing plays for students. The representations became a principal means for celebrating great occasions. If special honor was to be done to a festival, or a princely visit was expected, the market-place, the Rathhaus, or the church was prepared, and it was the professor's or the school-master's duty to direct the boys in their performance of a play. We get glimpses in the chronicles of the circumstances under which the representations took place. The magistrates—even the courts—lent brilliant dresses. One old writer laments that the ignorant people

have so little sense for arts of this kind. "Often tumult and mocking are heard, for it is the greatest joy to the rabble if the spectators fall down through broken benches." The old three-storied stage of the mysteries was often retained, with Heaven above, Earth in the middle space, and Hell below, where, according to the stage direction of the "Golden Legend," "the devils walked about and made a great noise." Lazarus is described as represented in the sixteenth century, before a hotel, before which sat the rich man carousing, while Abraham, in a parson's coat, looked out of an upper window. This rudeness, however, belongs rather to the "Volks-comödie" than the "Schul-comödie," whose adjuncts were generally far more rational, and sometimes even brilliant,—as in the Strassburg representations. It was only in the seminaries that art was preserved from utter decay. One may trace the Schul-comödie until far down in the eighteenth century, and in the last mention I find of it appears an interesting figure. In 1780, at the military school in Stuttgart, the birthday of the Duke of Würtemberg was celebrated by a performance of Göthe's "Clavigo." The leading part was taken by a youth of twenty-one, with high cheek-bones, a broad, low Greek brow, above straight eye-brows, a prominent nose, and lips nervous with an extraordinary energy. The German narrator says he played the part "abominably,—shrieking, roaring, unmannerly to a laughable degree." It was the young Schiller, wild as a Pythoness upon her tripod, with the "Robbers," which became famous in the following year.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASTERSINGERS.

Let us turn now to the poetry which, if it is not the best of this period of decline, is at any rate the most characteristic, — the work of the Mastersingers. When the race of Minnesingers came to an end, they were not without heirs. Men of knightly station no longer rode from castle to castle prepared to sing, with lute in hand, the praises of ladies. There were, however, wandering minstrels, whose merit had become very inferior, and whose repute was of the worst. At tournaments the rough play of arms was sometimes interrupted by songs sung by the heralds or their assistants.¹ At the festivals of the peasants there were poets who, in a similar way, performed a humbler office.² At weddings, baptisms, and other family festivals in the cities, especially Nuremberg, poets, dressed in white cloaks and decorated with badges of silver,³ took part in the celebration. At the end of the thirteenth century, among the last of the Minnesingers, lived Heinrich Frauenlob, a poet already mentioned. He has all the faults of a time of decay, — an overweening opin-

¹ Wappendichter.

² Pritschenmeister.

³ Spruchspracher.



ion of himself, hopelessness with respect to the world, complaint of misappreciation,—a fantastic, hair-splitting over-refinement, instead of the simple, unconscious nature of poets like Walther von der Vogelweide. From some real or fancied praise of women, from which perhaps came his name, he was held by them in high honor. In the old cathedral of Mainz, where his grave is shown, a bas-relief represents the poet's coffin borne on the shoulders of women. Tradition says he was really so buried, and libations of wine so liberally poured out that the church swam with it. Nothing that Frauenlob has left justifies such especial observances in his honor. He it was who, by establishing some sort of a school in which men of the higher class were taught the rules of singing and poetry, is said to stand at the transition point where the class of noble minstrels pass over into the Mastersingers, although certain unauthenticated statements give an earlier date.

The disposition to write and sing developed into a strange passion among the handicraftsmen of the towns, spreading from city to city until there was scarcely one not affected by it; in Southern Germany its manifestations were especially numerous and grotesque. Although the poetry of the Minnesingers shades into that of the Mastersingers by imperceptible gradations, some points of contrast may be noticed: the former was cultivated by the nobles, and became a profession; the latter by burghers and their workmen, and was only a curious form of amusement; in the minnelieder the greatest freedom prevailed as to subject and form; the Master-

singers, however, worked according to very definite laws. In each school these laws were carefully written down; although there was rarely formal connection between the Mastersingers of different cities, the rules in each case varied but little; the singers went from city to city, engaging in contests without suffering embarrassment. The collection of laws was called the "Tabulatur." Three "Merker," or umpires, were presidents in each school, who at festivals sat upon a stage, with a Bible close at hand. The churches were the most frequent places of assembling; sometimes the festival took place in the town hall, sometimes in the open air. In Wagner's opera of the "Mastersingers," in which the old life is closely reproduced, the Mastersingers are represented as marching in procession into the church of Saint Katherine, in Nuremberg, where a contest takes place in which the victor is to receive the hand of the beautiful daughter of a goldsmith. Again, a festival takes place in a broad meadow in the outskirts of the city, the minstrels and the trade-guilds entering to a glorious march. The shoemakers sing a song in honor of Saint Crispin, who stole leather from the rich to make shoes for the poor; the tailors celebrate a hero of their trade who, during a siege, sewing himself up in goat-skins, performed such antics on the city walls that the frightened enemy withdrew. At length the handsome hero of the piece sings his way to victory, and maid and lover are happily united.¹

¹ The Nation.

The Mastersingers cared little or nothing for the inner import of their songs, giving an absurd attention to the outward form. In the schools there were various grades, as in freemasonry. Those who were successful had the privilege of decking themselves magnificently in the paraphernalia of the order. A silver chain, with a badge representing King David, adorned the neck; wreaths of silk were placed upon the head. In the richer cities the decorations were splendid, and to have gained them was the greatest of honors,—not alone to the individual, but to his family and guild; the officials of the order nodded approval, and the throng of burghers and their wives present gave the heartiest applause. Some of the names of favorite airs that have come down to us are very fantastic:¹ “The Striped-saffron Flower-tune of Hans Findeisen,” “The English Tin-tune of Caspar Enderles,” “The Blood-gleaming Wire-tune of Jobst Zolner,” “The Many-colored Coat-tune of F. Fromer.” The taste is grotesque enough, yet it possessed the world wonderfully. The shoemaker would leave his awl and waxed-end, the tailor hang up his shears, the blacksmith forsake hammer and anvil,—all listening to, or taking part in, the curious stupidity. Developing in obscure ways, the mastersinging was at the height of its popularity in the century of the Reformation; from that time it declined, lingering,

¹ Die gestreift-Safran-Blümleinweis Hans Findeisens, die Englische-Zinnweis Kaspars Enderles, die blut-glänzende Drathweis Jobst Zolners, die Vielfarb-Rockweis F. Fromers.

however, into our own age. As late as 1770 a festival was held at Nuremberg; at Ulm, as late as 1838, four old masters were still living. These resigned, in that year, their tabulatur and paraphernalia to the Lieder-Kranz, and announced that the long succession of Mastersingers had come to an end.

The Mastersingers did much good, though not in ways that they intended. It is to be noticed that precisely those cities in which they most flourished were the cities which most zealously accepted the Reformation. We may be sure it was not a chance coincidence. The mastersinging indicated a certain intellectual activity. The Bible, moreover, was always close by the umpires when they were discharging their office; every member of a mastersinging guild must have a reputation for honesty and piety, and to this was due in part the superior morality which distinguished the citizen from the noble. The number of names of individuals is very small which even the elaborate accounts have thought it worth while to preserve from among the crowd of Mastersingers. Of these I need to consider only one,—and that one rather for what he did outside of mastersinging than for the work in which he conformed to the Tabulatur. He seems indeed to have felt himself its triviality, and based his title to fame on other foundations.

Of the cities honorably prominent, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as seats of blooming trade, and strong and brilliant life of every kind, no one equals Nuremberg. It stood, full of thrift and cul-

ture, with an admirable constitution. It produced and retained within its bounds many men of great energy and genius, and knew also how to attract ability from abroad,—an art which republics have seldom understood. It was great in commerce and manufactures, in inventions, science, and art. It was the centre and high-school of the mastersong,—for more than one hundred years the main cradle of the German drama. It included within its walls such numbers of distinguished men that not only could no German city compare with it, but many countries of large extent were surpassed, and the great Italian cities were only doubtfully superior.¹

Hans Sachs was born in 1494, the son of a tailor in Nuremberg. From his seventh to his fifteenth year he was a pupil in a Latin school; at seventeen, as an apprentice, he began his wandering, visiting with interest the mastersinging festivals wherever they occurred, and writing at Munich his first poems. As life went forward he developed into a thrifty citizen, becoming the father of seven children, all of whom he survived. With all his business activity, he studied diligently, and, with astonishing fecundity, wrote six thousand and forty-eight separate pieces, forming thirty-four solid folio volumes of manuscript.² His authority in his time was very great, and used without fear or favor in behalf of the Reformation, which was in full progress as he came forward into manhood. He had great knowl-

¹ Gervinus.

² Koberstein.

edge of the world, and was familiar, besides, with all the literature of his time, so far as it had been intrusted to books. He was well read in history and mythology, knew the Teutonic and Celtic legends, and frequently refers to the Italian writers, who, just before, had made their country famous. His poems are upon all possible subjects, and of the most various kinds,—the drama, the lyric, the satire, receiving from him especial favor. His best works are those in which he represents the burgher life, in the midst of which he lived. His master-songs are no better than those of his contemporaries,—a worthlessness of which he seems himself to have been conscious,—for although they comprised by far the larger number of the pieces that he wrote, from the collection of his poems which he himself prepared they were excluded. His earnest pieces have less interest than those of a whimsical, comical character.

Hans Sachs gradually sank in the estimation of the world until he was held in utter contempt. Göthe and Wieland, however, brought him again into favor, and he is now highly esteemed as one of the bravest and worthiest of the figures that stood by the side of Luther. He leads us into the midst of soldiers, peasants, tradesmen, knights, gypsies, priests, and scholars; he points out their follies; we hear his voice, meanwhile, admonishing them to temperance and morality. Although reproving, he has a hearty enjoyment of life, takes the world's merry tricks in good part, and when the crowd is at cross-purposes, with cheerfulness and prudence tries

to reconcile them. His pieces are often tediously prolix, and of weak wit, but all the honorable characteristics of the German middle class—the sturdy mechanic virtues, public spirit, honesty, common sense, doughty moral worth of every kind—speak out of every tone and thought.¹ In the pieces now to be quoted there is a touch of irreverence, judging by our standards. To omit it, however, would be dispensing with something most characteristic of the man and the time. It is what we see in the miracle-plays, and is to be considered as the naïveté of child-like souls, rather than as intentional disrespect toward what should be held sacred.

THE TAILOR AND THE FLAG.²

There was once a tailor in Strassburg who was a famous workman. He saw, one night, the devil, holding in his hand a flag thirty yards long, made out of the patches, of all materials and colors, which the tailor had stolen from the cloth of his customers. The frightened man cried out, tore his hair, and turned to the wall; the devil vanished, and the tailor was restored to himself by being sprinkled with holy water. Soon the sick man could sit up in bed; he told the attendants the story, and begged them, whenever he cut a garment thereafter, to remind him of the devil and the flag. The tailor recovered; his attendants reminded him faithfully of the vision, which he bore thankfully for about a

¹ Gervinus.

² Bibliothek der deutschen Klassiker.

month ; but one day he was cutting a garment for a lady from a rich fabric. The admonition was given, but the tailor replied that he did not remember to have seen that particular color in the devil's flag, and appropriated a piece. At length the tailor died, and came before the door of Heaven. Saint Peter asks who and what he is, and, upon his reply, remarks that for many years no tailor has come to Heaven, and hesitates about admitting him. The tailor pleads that he is very cold. "Let me come in and warm myself. I'll only sit behind the stove an hour or two, and then go." The pitying saint at length admits him, and the tailor curls down behind the stove. Word comes, meanwhile, that a pious old priest is going to die. At once the Lord, with all the heavenly host, hastily sweeps down to the earth to conduct worthily to Heaven the soul of the good pastor of Vilzhoven. The tailor takes the opportunity to creep out and view the place. When he comes to the throne of the Lord, he audaciously seats himself upon it, and enjoys the fine view, observing what is happening among all nations. At length he sees a poor woman hanging out on a hedge the clothes of herself and children, which she has just washed. As she goes away a rich woman steals a handkerchief from the hedge and goes off with it, at which dishonesty the tailor is so incensed that he takes in both hands the Lord's footstool, throws it at the woman, and cripples her so that she is hump-backed all her life after. Now the host of Heaven is heard returning, whereupon the tailor creeps again behind the stove. As the

Lord resumes His seat He misses His footstool, and enquires of Saint Peter what can have become of it. Peter charges the tailor with the theft, who is forthwith hunted out and placed on trial. The trembling culprit tries to excuse himself by telling the story of the theft of the handkerchief. "O tailor, tailor!" cries the Lord, "if, while you lived, I had thrown my footstool at you every time you stole anything, do you think there would have been a tile left in your house?"

Hans Sachs, in several pieces, touches upon the vices of the soldiery. The devil, he says, once heard about the landsknechts and sent out Beelzebub to bring him in a pair, promising to make a prince of him if he succeeded. Beelzebub goes to a tavern, at which a party of landsknechts are reveling, and hides behind a stove, watching his chance. He is so terrified at their conduct and language that he escapes, much frightened, out of the chimney, and goes home in great haste. To the devil's query if he has brought any soldiers back with him, he answers that, so far from doing so, he has barely been able to return himself; that they are wilder than the demons themselves, "and if they were among us, Hell would soon be too narrow." "If that is true," says the devil, "we will never meddle with them any more."

Another characteristic piece of Hans Sachs is the story of Saint Peter and the goat. Saint Peter was perplexed with the prevalence of injustice in the world, and thought he could make affairs better if he were permitted to manage them. He frankly

confesses his idea to the Lord. Meanwhile a peasant girl appears, complaining that she must do a hard day's work, and at the same time keep in order a frolicsome young goat. "Now," said the Lord to Peter, "you must have pity on this girl, and take care of her goat. That will serve as an introduction for you to the management of the universe." Peter undertakes the goat, and finds quite enough to do.

The young goat had a playful mind,
And never liked to be confined;
The apostle, at a killing pace,
Followed the goat in desperate chase;
Over the hills and among the briars
The goat runs on, and never tires,
While Peter, behind, on the grassy plain,
Runs on, panting and sighing in vain.
All day, beneath the scorching sun,
The good apostle had to run,
Till evening came; the goat was caught,
And safely to the Master brought.
Then, with a smile, to Peter said
The Lord: "Well, friend, how have you sped?
If such a task your powers has tried,
How could you keep the world so wide?"
Then Peter, with his toil distressed,
His folly with a sigh confessed.
"No, Master, 'tis for me no play
To rule one goat for one short day;
It must be infinitely worse
To regulate the universe."¹

In a piece written in 1522, called "The Wittenberg Nightingale, which is now heard everywhere," Hans Sachs signifies his adhesion to the cause of the Reformation. A herd, blinded by false light, has

¹ Translation of Gostwick and Harrison.

wandered from its shepherd into a desert, where it falls among wild beasts. Many sheep are torn by them, especially by the lion, a type of Leo X.; the flock despairs of life, when suddenly a charming nightingale (Luther) raises her voice, guiding those who follow her to a beautiful flowery meadow, where the sun shines clear and the springs flow. The lion seeks in vain to kill the nightingale; other beasts raise loud cries to drown her song, but in vain. None of the beasts that tread the pasture suffer themselves to be misled into the desert. A long explanation follows of the doctrines and observances of the Church which were especially opposed by Luther. The whole ends with a summons to forsake the pope and return to Christ, the good shepherd.

Close upon midnight, on a night at the end of May, the train left me before the Frauenthor of Nuremberg; and going forward in the light of the full moon, the noise of the locomotive gradually growing fainter, I seemed to leave the nineteenth century, and go back in time four hundred years. Glorified in the radiance, there rose the picturesque outline of the walls which have come down untouched from the Middle Ages, from the hand of Albrecht Dürer; now a battlemented projection, from which one might expect the challenge of a cross-bowman; now a massive round tower; now a sharp, gilded pinnacle. Crossing the deep moat, I passed through the heavy archway, and was on the pavement of the quaint street, channelled by tides of human life for so many, many

years. It was long before I could give up the scene. The city was perfectly still, except that in open places, now and then, where there were trees, the deep, sweet, intermittent note of the nightingales filled the air with music. The spires of the ancient churches rose high above the cavernous, grotesquely-carved portals; in the worn and mossy basins of the old fountains the water plashed softly, flowing from curious devices, — now from the breasts of women, now from the twisted necks of geese, held under the arms of a comical figure. In the streets were rows of those famous homes of the men long gone, which our elegant cities now please themselves with reproducing, — high-pointed gables and buttressed walls, the heavy, twisted brackets holding up the projecting stories, the surfaces broken with massive beams and variegated tiles, and surmounted by water-spouts, now in the form of a cherub's face, now contorted into the shape of a demon or a monster, according to the caprice of the builder.

I spent the night at the ancient hostlery of "The Lamb," in a low guest-chamber, lit by diminutive panes, whose wainscoting was ornamented with the portraits of three full-bearded carousers, plumed and in doublets, who slept in the same room when Charles V. was emperor. The streets next day, under the glare of the sun, and filled with a modern generation, were hardly so interesting as in solitude, and lit by the glamour of the moon at midnight; but when I went into the churches of Saint Lawrence and Saint Sebald, the sunbeams falling dustily

through the colored windows upon the rich carvings of pulpit and pillar, the illusion returned. The fine associations of the churches are a thousand, and none are finer than those with the stout artisans of Nuremberg, who gave the city its ancient fame. These temples they wrought out, these they frequented, here they have left their portraits, and here often they lie buried. On the screen of the wonderful shrine in Saint Sebald's stands the stalwart figure of Peter Vischer, who made it, his blacksmith's apron before his rotund stomach, his workman's cap above his manly, full-bearded face. In the church of Saint Lawrence, Adam Krafft and his journeymen, crouched down upon the pavement, hold up on broad shoulders their handiwork, the beautiful pyx, whose curling summit, graceful as a lily stem, bends to avoid contact with the arch above. Here they wrought, here they worshipped; most interesting and significant of all, here they came in their guilds, from forge and shoe-shop, from ropewalk and carpenter's bench, and contended laboriously in song and poem. From these doors went out the Mastersingers, with anxious faces, to contests in neighboring cities, — at Bamberg, at Ulm, or at Hof. Here they were received when, with leather apron laid aside, the honest breast heaved proudly beneath a gold or silver chain, the prize gained somewhere by labored rhyming.

I dreamed awhile in the churches, then going once more into the street, stood presently before the house where lived the greatest of the Mastersingers, Hans Sachs, the cobbler. It is a substantial struct-

ure with a tablet let into the front inscribed with his name,—so near to the market-place that the burghers may have heard him thence, whether he were hammering away at a ditty or a tough strip of sole-leather. The house corroborates the testimony of the chronicles that he worked his way to a substantial position. Far beyond the walls of Nuremberg he made himself known, doing his part, meantime, toward keeping his generation well shod.


As I think of a figure which will best describe Hans Sachs, I am reminded of what I once heard from a farmer of the Connecticut Valley. "The land on which tobacco does best," he said, "is not that which is richest, but a certain rather poor, sandy soil, which has little strength in itself. It has great power, however, of absorbing the fertilizers thrown upon it, which in turn it pours, without retention, into the coarse, leathery leaves, spreading until they cover the meadow." The mind of Hans Sachs was such a soil. Receptive to a wonderful degree, from travel and observation at home, he absorbed the contemporary world; he gathered much too from the past. All this he threw into the unrefined, voluminous product which was harvested at last into the thirty-four great folios. It is not quite sightly,—not at all adapted to the sensitive and delicate; but a whiff of him now even is not unwholesome, or without enjoyment, in an atmosphere charged with moral malaria, and we can understand well that in its day and place it may have had power to brace the soul in important ways.

Whoever visits the museum at Berlin will linger

long upon the staircase in the centre, to see the great wall-paintings, in which Kaulbach represents the leading epochs of history. It is the last picture of the series, which is usually thought the finest, and is most familiar, — The Era of the Reformation. In an immense hall are grouped the figures that wrought the modern world, — poets and philosophers, artists and reformers, discoverers and scholars. Columbus towers here, his brow heavy with his great thought ; here Kepler and Copernicus demonstrate the theories that have reconstructed for us the heavens. The great Italians whose names are connected with the revival of learning are busy in ways that symbolize their noble activity, while close at hand is the face of Shakespeare, shadowed by mighty imaginations. The imperious Elizabeth stands in a posture of command ; the bold Gustavus makes a soldierly gesture ; Erasmus and Reuchlin proceed with dignified pace in scholars' gowns, while Albrecht Dürer spreads upon the wall a magnificent decoration. Prince and statesman, warrior and sage, bard and preacher, — the painter has thrown them upon the canvas by the score, — all names of note for worthy striving in that so memorable crisis. Directly in front, in a place of prominence, whom do we find but homely Hans Sachs ! He sits crouched upon the pavement, in such homely attire as he wore in the Nuremberg streets, with a thoughtful head bending forward in deep absorption, as if he had turned aside a moment from his leather to frame a song. An honest heart and plain good sense have lifted the cobbler thus into the company of the great of the era of the Ref-



ormation. And who is it, in the centre of the picture, that stands as the focus of the whole? A plainly-robed monk, of vigorous frame and powerful countenance, bearing the impress of unshrinking boldness. He holds on high, that the whole world may see it, the open Bible. Now across the scene is thrown for us the Titanic shadow of Luther.



CHAPTER VIII.

LUTHER IN LITERATURE.

With regard to many a famous historical character, the judgment of the world in our time has been reversed. Names that have been revered have come to be treated with contumely; names that have been contemned have come to be treated with respect. Scholars have satisfied themselves that Tiberius Cæsar and Nero have not received justice. Though we may not entirely trust Mr. Froude, no candid reader will hereafter feel disposed to set aside Henry VIII. as simply brutal and cruel; on the other hand, we cannot hold Archbishop Cranmer to have been simply a great benefactor. Hepworth Dixon shows plainly that the character of Bacon has been much maligned. With regard to Luther, there has been a twofold judgment: the Catholic world holding him to have been Anti-christ,—little better than Satan himself; the Protestant world considering him the greatest name in the Church since the days of the apostles. Of both judgments there has been to some extent a reversal, for Catholic writers of our century can be cited who pay to the memory of Luther noble tributes;¹ and, on the other hand, no

¹ Friedrich Schlegel, Döllinger, Von Eichendorff.

less a man than Göthe thought that he had been much over-estimated, and had done in the world really more harm than good. Göthe considered Erasmus to have been a wiser spirit. Erasmus had, when the Reformation began, a large following ; for there were many men within the pale of the ancient Church who were prepared to support his plans. Terrified by Luther's iconoclasm, they went back into positions which they never would have taken but for their fear before the extremist. The ignorant mass were perplexed with subtleties of philosophy and theology which led them into trouble without helping them ; old superstitions were exchanged for new ideas which were full of superstitions scarcely less harmful ; the most terrible war of modern times came at length, lasting thirty years ; and even now, at the distance of more than three hundred years, there is the bitterness of death between the two parties,—which perhaps, with different management, would never have been sundered.¹

It is right, among the jarring opinions, to say this : In eras of change, among reformers two classes of men present themselves. One class dreads a convulsion,—believes in employing methods which will secure the end gradually ; thinks that a little temporizing is better than bloodshed ; that the minds of men should be quietly softened toward the good, and the world not startled by sudden conversion.

¹ Froude: *Short Studies on Great Subjects*—Luther and Erasmus. Crabb Robinson's Diary.

The other class will brook no delay ; to temporize belongs to the devil ; for true men there is nothing possible but to seize the absolute good, through whatever suffering and destruction. In the struggle which Americans have so lately lived through, among those anxious to bring to pass a better world these classes have been very plain. On one side have been a multitude of conscientious persons who saw evil and were stubborn in their resolution to destroy it, but who believed it might be accomplished by means gentler, if slower, than warfare. On the other side were the Garrisons and John Browns, who believed that the Union, as it stood, was a "covenant with death and an agreement with hell," not to be tolerated for a moment. If we ascend to the times of the French revolution, something similar may be seen in the parties whose types were, on the one side, the moderate Lafayette, and on the other, Robespierre and Saint Just. In the English revolution, again, we behold conservative patriots, open-eyed before the evils, but who believe they can remedy them without an utter overturn, types of whom are Clarendon and the noble Falkland ; opposed to whom stands the stubborn figure of Cromwell, who will hear of no compromise. A century earlier, in the convulsion with which we have to do at present, the genial Erasmus is the type of the moderate men who believed in the possibility of a gradual betterment ; Luther, of those who will hear nothing of politic handling, striking at the foundations of the old order, reckless of cost to the world.

I do not accept the view that Luther must be

reckoned among the harmful men of history ; nor the other view, that his work was only beneficent. Whatever our judgment may be as to what he actually accomplished, it seems to me that the man himself must always tower conspicuous among the heroes of human history, superb in grand purpose and self-neglecting boldness. I shall try to touch all points impartially, and feel that I am in a position to do so, from the fact that, much as I revere the man, to my mind there is scarcely less superstition in the system he sought to establish than in the system he sought to overthrow. It is the effect of Luther upon German literature that we have to consider. We cannot, however, separate Luther the writer from Luther the man of action, and I must briefly outline his career and historical position.

Never had the papal power appeared to its upholders to be more secure than at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Throughout Europe the pontiff beheld at his feet a reverent and submissive company of nations ; or, if there were discontent, the Church seemed able to quell it by the simple lifting of her arm. We who live so long after the period, having access to ample pages of history, can see plainly enough, in the apparent peace and security, signs of an inevitable change. The change had been long preparing ; indeed, from the very origin of the papacy one may trace the existence of Protestant tendencies. The Church had always succeeded in suppressing them, but strength had been spent in the effort, and she had become more

infirm than she knew. From the day when the papal power, protected by the sword of the grateful Pepin, had been fairly established in its supremacy, down through its whole history, is to be traced a parallel line of protest and dissent. In some countries the spirit of discontent had been more rife than in others. In England and Northern Europe, in Switzerland and parts of Bohemia, it was especially prevalent. Claude of Turin, Peter of Bruis, Arnold of Brescia, the Mystics, of whom Tauler is the representative, the Vaudois peasants, Savonarola, Wickliffe, Huss,—the line of bold men is uninterrupted whose voices had so often been smothered in dungeons or silenced by torture and fire. Since the burning of Huss there had been a wide-spread sowing of the seed of martyr-blood, whose fruit was to be the Reformed Church. Denouncing voices grew more numerous. The low murmur, resounding from the ninth century, never dying into silence, now sinking faint for a time, then swelling louder as age followed age, coming now from Albigensian valleys, now from a Piedmont mountain, from the shore of a Swiss lake, or an English cloister, rose at last into a fierce outcry.

To the city of Wittenberg, in Saxony, in 1517, came the Dominican, Tetzels, to sell indulgences. What precisely they were, and whether the traffic was or was not justifiable, will not be considered here. The wrath of one man, at any rate, was aroused; for a paper couched in indignant language was one day found nailed to the door of the church,

in which Tetzels and his errand were denounced. "Who is he?" said the Dominican. "Who is he?" said all Germany presently, for the paper went far and wide. "Brother Martin Luther, Augustinian monk, professor in the university, now a man in his prime." The people of Wittenberg all knew him as the popular city preacher; the faculty of his university all knew him as a good-natured, but over-arrogant, spirit who had dared to blaspheme the great gods of the schoolmen,—Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. There was little more to say, except that his father was a miner out of the Thuringian woods, and that he himself was born at Eisleben, in Saxony. The friars laughed; the rich bishops wondered at the monk's impertinence; Leo X., out of his purple, passed an elegant sarcasm on Brother Martin's fine parts; Erasmus and the bolder scholars looked with eagerness to see what this unexpected recruit to their ranks would do next; Friedrich, elector of Saxony, cautiously rejoicing, sought to palliate to the pope the offence of his subject; but Maximilian, the emperor, wrote a letter of alarm. Leo had thought to dismiss the matter with a joke, but when great princes were so concerned, he saw that more was necessary. Legates were sent to bend him, but Brother Martin remained inflexible. under the protection of the elector.

At length came a famous disputation at Leipsic between professors from Wittenberg and Ingolstadt. In the splendid ducal hall were assembled many magnates of the electorate, both ecclesiastical and lay. Little interest was felt until a thin young man, of

middle size, ascended the steps of the platform. His self-possession was unruffled; he carried a bouquet in his hand; his voice was melodious and clear; the Bible was at his tongue's end; his face showed the marks of intense mental conflicts. At the end of the dispute Luther stood still further committed in opposition to the Church. All Germany was talking about him now; he stood in the attitude of Huss and Jerome, and events bade fair to bring about for him a similar fate. But he was not alone. A powerful prince of the empire threw about him the strength of his whole domain; the scattered forces of rebellion throughout Europe recognized a new leader, and began to concentrate about him. Then Leo hurled his last and most terrible weapon, before which heretofore kings had gone down, broken in power and spirit, — excommunication.

One December day, by the Elster gate of Wittenberg, preparations, as men saw, had been made for a bonfire. Faggots lay about in the snow, and presently from the city came the sound of tramping feet. The university — professors and students — appeared through the gate; a fire was kindled, and Luther, who marched in front, with contemptuous gestures threw into the flames the canon law, some writings of the school-men, and — unheard of boldness — the papal bull of anathema! Then turning on his heel, fearless and defiant, he reëntered the city. The attention of the world now centred upon him more strongly than ever. A rebellious spirit was everywhere abroad, breaking out in the most unexpected quarters; and the new emperor, Charles V.,

felt called upon to give the matter his most serious attention.

In 1521 a diet of the empire was convened at Worms, and Luther was summoned to be present. An imperial safe-conduct was granted; but if it should be violated, there were well-remembered precedents to which the powers might appeal. His friends besought him to remain in safety under the protection of his powerful supporter. His enemies sought to terrify him from appearing, by threats. But Luther's sagacity enforced his courage. He knew mankind; he knew the ardent hero-worship that follows a fearless, self-reliant course. "If the devils at Worms are as thick as the tiles on the house-tops," he said, characteristically, "at Worms I will still appear." The people, as he passed on, flocked in awe to see him. He entered Worms in a great procession, shouting, as is said, a defiant hymn. Before the assembly he stood unembarrassed, one poor monk in his sober robe. The sun pouring through the windows found only one dull spot in the hall, the rough, brown frock of Luther. Elsewhere it shone on the scarlet of cardinals, multiplied itself a hundredfold on princely diadems, on chains and sword-hilts, on the armor of knights, on the emblems of mighty power. "Unless," said he, "my errors can be demonstrated from texts of scripture, I will not and can not recant; for it is not safe for a man to go against his conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise; God help me!" He was permitted to retire,—henceforth the idol of the nation. The souls of Germans every-

where were thrilled with a new pride, that they were the countrymen of Luther. It seemed as if, in the old Thuringian wood, the heart of an oak had bartered its sylvan life for a human spirit ; and then, toughly knit with the fibrous vigor that could defy the mountain whirlwinds, had come to withstand the potent forces of the hierarchy !

With the diet of Worms the crowning point of Luther's career is reached ; he never became more famous ; he never appeared more grandly. We cannot follow him step by step through the fifteen remaining years of his life. His seclusion in the Wartburg while he begins his translation of the Bible ; his marriage with Katherine von Bora, the recusant nun ; his sojourn in the castle of Coburg during the diet at Augsburg ; his fierce controversies and enormous labors, must go unnoticed. His life was filled with toil to his last hour, perplexed and anxious beyond the lot of mortals. He had hoped that his cause might triumph without civil commotion ; but now too plainly over Europe lowered the shadow of the dark years of bloodshed that were impending. In his eager pursuit of what he felt to be harmful, he had unleashed all the unsettled, revolutionary elements in society, which pressed along with him in the same chase. But the pack constantly became more tumultuous, until at length the huntsman was in danger of being devoured by his own dogs. Never was scourge more vigorous than that with which Luther laid about him, as he withheld now and then from the hunt to discipline his too wild auxiliaries. Some were indeed wolves,

and deserved the cuts they received from the strong arm ; others, however, were trusty helpers, who did not merit the bitter lashing. But whether it was the wise and tolerant Zwingli, or the extravagant Carlstadt, the oppressed peasant hoping that a better time had come for him, and rising to meet it, or the licentious follower of John of Leyden, Luther smote them all with indiscriminating wrath. He too often forgot his own liberal declarations ;¹ he never forsook entirely his former faith, departing from the traditions of the Church no farther than he thought they were absolutely contradicted by the scriptures. In particular he refused all fellowship with those who denied the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. While he was over-strict in trifles, he was sometimes too tolerant of grave offences, — for instance, of the bigamy of his friend the landgrave of Hesse. Nothing can surpass the fury that he sometimes showed in controversy ; in particular he assailed the peasants with expressions that are terrible. “I think there are no more devils in hell, but all have gone into the peasants. Whoever is slain on the side of the magistrates is a veritable martyr of God, if he fights with a good conscience. Whoever perishes on the side of the peasants will burn everlastingly in hell, for he is a limb of the devil.

¹ In a letter of Lessing's, written in his early manhood, he narrates an instance of Luther's intolerance, saying: “I hold Luther in such reverence that I like to discover some small faults in him. The traces of humanity which I find in him are to me as precious as the most dazzling of his perfections.” This may be compared with the delight Theodore Parker is said to have taken in the swearing of Washington at Monmouth.

Such times have come that a prince can serve Heaven better with bloodshed than prayer. Therefore, dear lords, let him who can, thrust, strike, and kill. If, meanwhile, you are slain, more blissful death you could never undergo.”¹ There are other expressions even stronger than these. The polemic literature of the world has nothing more forcible—perhaps we may say nothing more shocking—than some of these expressions; they read like the imprecations of some old Norse god, lashed into a Berserker rage.

The name of Luther must be connected with the saddest superstition of his time. He urged witch-burnings, and would no doubt have cheerfully assisted at them.² He was the child of peasants, and in his conception the devil has a very ancient, heathenish stamp. The devil makes the destructive tempests; the angels make the good winds,—as in the pagan days the giant eagles were believed to do, with the beat of their wings, sitting upon the border of the world. The devil sits as Nixie under the bridge, drawing girls into the water, whom he marries. He serves as a house-spirit in the cloister; as a cobold, he blows out the fire; as a dwarf, he substitutes imps for human children in the cradle, befools sleepers so that they climb upon roofs, and haunts chambers. It was in this last character especially that he disturbed Luther. He believed that his mother had been injured by a witch, and was angry at the courts

¹ Schrift wider die räuberischen Bauern.

² Freytag.

for not punishing them with sufficient severity. Luther so emphasized his faith in the devil and witches that those who followed him went into great extremes. The superstition was brought into a prominence which it had never had before, the persecutions resulting which affect us with such horror.

Yet as to Luther's honest purpose we can never be in doubt. "His heart was faithful and without falsehood. The hardness which he used against the enemies of the faith in his writings came, not from a quarrelsome or evil spirit, but from great earnestness and zeal for the truth."¹ Though his call to the princes in the time of the Peasants' War was so wild and fierce, his policy was no doubt in the right direction. There was, unfortunately, in Germany no better power than that of the princes; on them alone rested the future of the Fatherland. Neither the peasants, nor the robber nobles, nor the isolated imperial cities, gave any guarantee.² No mortal's path was ever more beset with difficulties; to say that he made mistakes is only saying that he was human. The movement of which he had been the spring now looked to him to be its guide. From the multitudes in revolt came a thousand appeals. He was arbiter in countless disputes; his correspondence was enormous; he wrote numberless tracts; he translated the Bible; his labors as a preacher were unparalleled. But he was equal to all. Day after day his busy pen heaped up piles of manuscript,

¹ Melancthon's funeral sermon.

² Freytag.

part to go to the farthest corners of Germany, with messages that might shake a throne; part to give cheer to friends in humble station, or with the purpose to make children happy; part containing the message of God to the old Hebrew, transmuted into the vigorous tongue of the North. Nothing was ever sweeter than the heart of the giant world-shaker. While at the Wartburg he went hunting, but his sympathy was with the hares and birds that were driven into snares by the men and dogs. To save the life of a young hare, he wrapped it in his sleeve; but the dogs coming, broke the creature's legs even in its protection. "So," said Luther, "does Satan gnash his teeth against the souls which I seek to save."¹ Very tender is the narration of the death of his favorite daughter, Magdalen. When his daughter lay deathly sick, "I love her very dearly," said he, "but dear God, since it is Thy will to take her hence, I am glad to know she will be with Thee." Then said the father, "Little daughter dear, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Turning away, he said, "Oh, she is so dear to me! If the flesh is so strong, what will the spirit be!" Then she died, going to sleep in her father's arms. The mother too was in the same room, but farther from the bed, on account of her grief. It was a little after nine, on Wednesday of the seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, 1543. When she lay in her coffin, he said, "Lena, darling, how well is it with thee! Thou wilt arise again and shine

¹ Freytag.

as a star,—yea, as the sun,—but the parting vexes me beyond measure sore. It is strange to know that she is certainly at peace, and that it is well with her, and yet be so sad.” At the funeral he said, among other things, “We must take care of the children, especially the poor girls. I have no pity for the boys; a boy supports himself, into whatever land he comes, if he will only work. But if he is lazy, he remains a good-for-nothing; but the poor girls must have a staff. A boy can get along after being a little wild, so that afterwards a fine man may come out of him. A maid cannot do that. She will soon come to shame if she forgets herself.”¹

He labored on, often violent and dogmatic, always honest and dutiful, fierce as a lion in his wrath, yet the tenderest of men, until at Eisleben, whither he had gone to settle disputes between the rulers of his native region, in 1546, worn out with care and anxiety, the great reformer died.

It was in active life that the powers of Luther found their most appropriate field,—extraordinary compound that he was of sense, energy, and boldness. His significance, however, was immense in the history of literature. In judging of him as a writer I shall not follow Hallam, who esteems him lightly.² Luther was neither a philosopher nor a poet. For metaphysical speculations he had no liking or aptitude, treating the school-men and their

¹ Tischreden.

² History of the Literature of Europe in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.

revered authorities with contempt, and in his controversies bearing down his opponents with sturdy, honest force, which sometimes became violence and arrogance, but never with superior subtlety. His imagination was not especially vivid. Though his writings abound with illustrations, they are more forcible and homely than beautiful, more apt than tasteful. The qualities most conspicuous in his style are the same that he showed in life, — robust strength and practical sense. In many a passage he is too strong. His greatest admirers are forced to admit he could scold like a fish-wife. Generally, his expressions are characterized by an oaken sturdiness; but in some of his letters, especially those to his wife and children, come out most sweet and genial utterances, hanging about the tough holes and limbs like vines flowering with delicate blossoms of gentleness. His writings are often diffuse and obscure, — faults due to the haste in which they were prepared; oftentimes they display strong eloquence.

In the great library at Berlin, through the glass lid of one of the cases, you see a book of white paper, grown yellow through age, on the pages of which, as it lies open before you, is the work of a pen which plainly moved under the impulse of an energetic spirit. Sometimes the mark is broad, where the fist bore down heavily; the tops and bottoms of the long letters are not ungraceful in their curves, thrown off, it is plain, in a moment, by a forcible whirl of the fingers; and so you trace the track of the strong, quick-moving hand down the page, thinking what eyes were bent upon

it, what forehead was knotted over it, what soul it was that set the breath panting meanwhile in the concentrated attention of the writer. It is Luther's translation of the Bible, in his own hand. Upon this he expended the full force of his talent. That Luther translated the Bible is a great gain, for this reason, aside from every other: that it was possible for him in this way to unfold the riches of the German tongue, and form it for all time.¹ Before Luther there were a multitude of dialects, no one of which was dominant, and the confusion was great. Luther restored unity, and it was through his Bible that his speech became the universal speech. Wherever the Reformation went, this also went, becoming the most popular—one might say the only—people's book. Upon this were founded all writings and addresses to the people, until it everywhere prevailed. "No hut so small, no household so poor, that Luther's Bible did not enter; it became for the people, not merely a book of devotion, but the staple reading. It contained the whole spiritual world, in which the young grew up, to which the old returned, from whose contents the weary and heavy-laden got relief, in the pressure of the day. For the keeping of our national spirit sound, undestroyed by fashionable folly or aping of the foreigner, this book was the panacea. Out of the simple households of our country parsons, our citizens, and peasant families—to which Luther's Bible was everything—

¹ Kurz.

proceeded, in the eighteenth century, the reformers of our national culture; and when they began to purify our beautiful language, they referred back to the inexhaustible treasury of this book.”¹

The homely character of Luther’s language commended it. In every word, term, and sentence people recognized their own talk, sounding to them familiar, though free from dialect. “I sweat blood and water,” he says, “trying to render the prophets into the vulgar tongue. Good God, what a labor to make these Hebrew writers speak German! They struggle furiously against giving up their beautiful language to our barbarous idiom. ’Tis as though you should force a nightingale to forget her sweet melody and sing like the cuckoo.” Again, he says, “We must not ask the pedants how one should talk German, as the asses [meaning the Papists] do; but we must ask the mother in the house, the children on the streets, the common men in the market; look at them in the mouth, hear how they talk, and interpret them accordingly; then they will understand that one is talking German. When Christ says ‘*Ex abundantia cordis, os loquitur*,’ if I follow the asses, I shall translate, “From the superfluity of the immaterial part proceedeth the utterance.’ Tell me, is that German? What German understands talk of that sort? What is ‘superfluity of the immaterial part’ to a German? That will no German say. But thus speaks the mother in the house, and the common man, ‘If the heart’s full,

¹ Ludwig Häusser.

the mouth 'll out with it.' That is talking proper German, which I have worked after, not altogether successfully. It has sometimes happened that we have sought after a word a fortnight, or three or four weeks, and then sometimes have not found it. In Job, Melancthon and I worked so that we sometimes scarcely got through three lines in four days ; but now that it is all ready, everybody can read and master it. He slides along as over a smooth board, where we have had to sweat and fret to get the stumbling-blocks out of the way." Luther and Melancthon once strove over a passage in the New Testament. "All I care for," said Melancthon, "is the Greek." "And all I care for," said Luther, "is the German."¹ He often went to market just to hear how the people talked, what idioms they used in such and such circumstances, and begged his friends to impart to him all the genuine popular phrases they could get hold of, saying, "Palace and court words I cannot use."

Luther's Bible would be an immortal work for the purity and genuine German stamp of the language alone, but this is scarcely its greatest value. He comprehends with an admirable certainty the various spirit of different books, rendering in simple narrative style what is historical ; giving in fiery speech, now inspiring, now crushing, the great images of the prophets ; in the Song of Solomon rendering the glow, the rapture, the grief of the

¹ "Es ist mir nur ums Griechische." "Und mir ums Deutsche," versetzte Luther.

lover, in truly Oriental color. In the Psalms his tone is most exalted, in the Gospels it is simplicity, in the Epistles lofty greatness and strength of conviction. If he had translated only one book with this completeness it would be wonderful; but the whole Bible, — so great a number of the most various writings, — to give these in their individuality, with such unsurpassable mastery, shows the richest talent, or, rather, such a reach of intellectual greatness as seldom belongs to man.¹

In the twenty-four volumes of the edition of the last century — the most complete of the works of Luther — are contained sermons, dissertations, poems, letters. He could strike all chords with equal felicity. Sometimes he is quietly instructive and genial, sometimes an enthusiastic expounder, sometimes he exhibits crushing power in sarcasm and mockery. In his polemical writings his strength, as has been considered, often becomes excessive rudeness; in particular against Henry VIII., the Anabaptists, and the unhappy peasants, all bounds of moderation are exceeded. He was thoroughly bold, and a man of the people, and often threatened the princes. The fulminations are sometimes full of genius, marvels of power, with which scarcely anything of the kind can be compared.

As an orator he was the greatest of his century, gifted by nature with all the necessary qualities of body and intellect. The effect of his addresses was always great, — often irresistible. He was clear,

¹ Kurz.

warm, and strong, and often full of fire; princes and peasants he affected equally. Here are some examples of his vigorous, homely sense: "God be praised," he says, in his preface to his Household Sermons,¹ "the Bible is open, with rich and useful books of many learned men, wherein a Christian may well rejoice. As the saying is, 'The cow goes in grass up to her belly,' so we now are richly provided with pasture of the Divine Word. God grant that we may feed gratefully, and become fat and strong from it, before a drought comes!" How could an advocate of compulsory education put his cause better than as follows: "I hold that the government ought to compel subjects to send their children to school. If it can compel subjects who are equal to it to carry spear and musket when the wars come, how much more can, and ought, it to compel the children to go to school; because a worse war is to be fought,—that with the harmful devil, who goes around sucking at cities and kingdoms until he draws out all the good people and leaves a mere worthless shell behind, with which, the yolk being gone, he can fool as much as he chooses." Here is his idea of the proper function of woman: "Women are adorned and graced with God's blessing and maternal honor, and we are all conceived, born, nourished, and brought up by them. I myself often feel great pleasure and entertainment when I see how women are adapted to the care of children. How skilfully do even little

¹ Hauspostille.

girls manage when they carry babies ! How mothers sport, with delicate, comforting gestures and movements, when they quiet a weeping child or lay it in the cradle ! Let a man undertake that now and he will be like a camel trying to dance." Never was given better doctrine for preacher or speaker of any kind than the following, from his Table-Talk, a collection of his sayings, made late in life, by men who were with him daily : " Cursed are all preachers that aim at high and hard things, neglecting the saving health of the poor, unlearned people, to seek their own honor ! When I speak, I sink myself deep down. I regard neither doctors nor magistrates, but I have an eye to the multitude of children and servants. A true and godly preacher should talk for the simple sort, like a mother that stills her child, — dandling it, giving it milk from her breast, and not needing malmsey or muscadine for it."

Luther is never so lovable as when he writes for his intimate friends, and his wife and children. Here is the sweet letter to his little son, which, well-known as it is, may well be read again and again for its artless charm :

" Grace and peace in Christ, my dear little son ! I love to see that you are learning well, and pray diligently. Go on in that way, my little boy. When I come home, I will bring you a pretty present. I know a pretty, cheerful garden. Many children go into it ; they have little golden coats on, and pick beautiful apples under the trees, and pears, and cherries, and plums ; they sing, jump, and are happy ; they have nice little horses too, with golden bits

and silver saddles. Then I asked the man who owns the garden whose the children were. He said, 'These are the children that love to pray, learn, and are good.' Then I said, 'Dear sir, I have a little son too, called Johnny Luther; he would like to come into the garden too, so that he could see such nice apples and pears, ride on such handsome horses, and play with these children.' 'Then,' said the man, 'if he loves to pray, learns, and is good, he shall come into the garden,—Lippus and Jost too; and if they all come together, they shall have whistles, drums, lutes, and all kinds of fiddles; they shall dance too, and shoot with little cross-bows.' And he showed me a pleasant meadow in the garden there, arranged for dancing; there hung golden whistles, drums, and handsome silver cross-bows. I said to the man, 'Ah, dear sir, I will go as quick as I can and write all this to my little boy, Johnny, so that he may pray industriously, learn well, and be good, so that he can come into the garden. But he has a nurse, Lehne; he must bring her with him. Then the man said, 'It shall be so; go and write him so.' Therefore, dear little son Johnny, learn and pray in confidence, and tell Lippus and Jost to do so too. Then you shall come to the garden together.'

The letter just given was written in 1530, at a most important time; when Luther carried his life, as it were, in his hand, and was charged with the heaviest responsibilities. He spent then some months in the castle of Coburg, to be near at hand for counsel during negotiations at Augsburg, a city to which his friends dared not allow him to pro-

- ceed, on account of the power of his enemies. In the midst of labors and dangers he could be playful and gentle. The following letter, written to intimate friends, is from the same place.

“There is a thicket immediately before our window, like a little forest, where the jays and the crows are holding a diet. There is such a going to and fro, such a crying day and night, without ceasing, as if they were all drunk or crazy. Old and young chatter so confusedly I am surprised that voice and breath can endure so long. I should much like to know whether there are any such chivalry with you; it seems to me they must have assembled here from the whole world round about. I have not yet seen their kaiser, but their great people parade and trail before our eyes, clothed not in a very costly way, but simply, all in color of one kind. They are all alike black, and all alike gray-eyed, but with a charming difference between the young and old. They care not for great palaces and halls; their hall is arched with the beautiful broad heaven, their floor is paved with fresh green branches, and their walls are as wide as the world. They ask not for horses and accoutrements. They have feathered wheels, so that they can fly from the guns, and escape wrath. There are great, powerful lords, but what they conclude I know not as yet. So much I learn from an interpreter: they propose a mighty campaign against wheat, barley, oats, and all kinds of corn and grain, and many a knight will be here, and do great deeds. So, here we sit at the diet; listen and look on with great

joy and love, seeing how the princes and lords, with all the high orders of the empire, sing and enjoy themselves so merrily. * * * We have heard to-day the first nightingale; they have hesitated about trusting April."

A good-hearted love for God's humble creatures speaks out too in this cheerful, mocking admonition, addressed to an old servant:

"We thrushes, blackbirds, finches, jays, together with other pious and honorable birds, who this autumn are to travel over Wittenberg, beg to say that we are credibly informed that one Wolfgang Lieberger, your servant, has undertaken a great piece of mischief, having bought dearly some old, spoiled nets, out of great anger and hatred toward us, therewith to set up an aviary, and proposes to prevent, not only our dear friends the finches, but us all, from having the freedom of flying in the air and picking grains on the earth, — the freedom given us by God. Since, therefore, we poor free birds are in this way thrown into great anxiety, our humble and friendly request to you is that you will dissuade your servant from the mischief. If he cannot be restrained from alluring us with corn, and getting up in the morning early to go to his snares, then we will avoid Wittenberg in our flight. We will pray to God to stand in his way, and that he may some day see, instead of us, frogs, locusts, and snails; and at night be marched over by mice, fleas, and bed-bugs, so that he may forget us, and not prevent our free flight. Given in our heavenly seat under the trees."

And now, at last, we must speak of Luther's hymns. He first made the chorals an essential part of the church service, putting a stamp upon them which they still retain. His songs are in the people's language, and warm and joyful with faith. It will quickly set the tears flowing in the eyes of a sensitive listener to hear the solemn, powerful sweep of the harmony, as a German congregation will pour them out in mighty, uplifting volume. They spread swiftly everywhere, and were received with enthusiasm, contributing hardly less to the general reception of the Reformation than did the translation of the Bible. His opponents complained that the people sang themselves often into Luther's doctrine, the Jesuit Conzenius saying, "The hymns of Luther have killed more souls than his books and speeches." The number of hymns is really small. Thirty-seven are attributed to him, and of these only five are entirely his own, the rest being translations and elaborations of Latin and German songs. It is hard to feel their beauty and majesty when taken from their proper language. The most famous of Luther's songs is "A Mighty Fortress is our God," the battle-hymn of the Protestants in their day of trial, and which, in the time of its composition, was believed to have a supernatural power. Says a writer of the year 1530: "Even the devils tremble and fly when they hear it,—a possessed person has been freed from his torture through hearing it." A verse or two must be given, although it is so familiar perhaps as to make quotation unnecessary:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His power and craft are great, —
And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

And though this world, with devils filled,
Shall threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure;
One little word can fell him.¹

And here, for a close to the extracts, are some stanzas from "A Childrens' Song for Christmas, about the baby Jesus," which I render as literally as possible :

A babe to-day is born for you,
Of Mary, virgin pure and true;
A baby lovable and bright,
To be your pleasure and delight.

It is the Lord Christ, God indeed!
Who 'll free you from distress and need.
He will himself your Saviour be;
From power of sin will set you free.

Therefore the sign aright remark,
The swaddling-clothes, the manger dark;
The which the pretty babe do fold
Who all the world doth keep and hold.

¹ Translation of F. H. Hedge.

Who is the pretty one so mild?
It is the little Jesus child.
The sinner thou hast deigned to bless:
O, welcome, welcome, noble guest!

Ah, Lord! Thou source and fount of all,
How then hast Thou become so small?
That Thou must lie on withered grass,
The fodder of the ox and ass.

Ah, little Jesus! baby sweet!
Make for thyself a cradle meet,
And take Thy rest within my heart,
Which from Thee never more shall part.

Heinrich Heine was a "spirit that denied,"—too often a Mephistophelean scoffer,—but he forgot his sneer when speaking of Luther. I do not know that Luther's position and influence in literature have been anywhere better estimated, in a few words, than in the following passage:¹

"He was not only the greatest, but also the most German, man of our history. The same man who could scold like a fish-wife could be soft too as a tender maiden. He was often wild as a tempest which uproots an oak, and then soft as a zephyr which caresses a violet. He possessed something original, incomprehensible, miraculous, as we find it among all providential men. Glory to Luther! Eternal glory to the beloved spirit to whom we owe the saving of our most precious possessions, and on whose benefits we yet live. He gave to the spirit its body, namely, to the thought the word. In his translation of the Bible he created

¹ Ueber Deutschland.

the German language, and the old book is an eternal source of renewal for our tongue. We owe to the grand Luther the spiritual freedom which the later literature needed for its development. He created for us the language in which the new literature could express itself. He himself also opens this literature ; it begins with him ; his spiritual songs are the first important memorials of it, and already announce its particular character. Whoever, therefore, proposes to speak about modern German literature must begin with Luther."

One day in the old palace at Berlin, passing with a knot of visitors through the suite of magnificent apartments, full of the pomp and circumstance with which the dynasty—now perhaps the most powerful on the face of the earth—surrounds itself, we passed under an antique, tarnished chandelier, which harmonized but poorly with the splendor about it. Nevertheless it was in a place of honor,—a place none too good, I thought, when presently our guide told us it hung once in the great hall of the city of Worms, and that under it stood Luther when, in the presence of the emperor and princes, he defied the great powers of the earth. I found myself gazing at the dull, quaint relic with an indescribable awe. "What a mighty part," I thought, "this man played on the earth ! After the great biblical figures, there is no man the Protestant world so reverences. I have come to feel that much held by him to be most sacred is superstition ; that he too often was harsh and cruel ; yet I find my heart beating with a quicker movement in presence of an object

upon which his eyes must once have rested. Whatever else may be neglected, I will at any rate make a pilgrimage to the spots memorable through Luther."

So I followed in his footsteps to cottage, to cloister, to lordly castle; stood in the little room in Eisleben in which he was born, hearing, meanwhile, from a school close by, the voices of children singing the chorals that he wrote; stood in the room in which he died; in the venerable pulpit too from which he preached for the last time, — the hour-glass, the cushions of leather, the worn staircase, the silent effigies upon the tombs below, all the same as in that old day. Here too it attuned the soul finely for entering such a shrine, that as I stood in the door-way of the old church the sound of an organ swelled from a school near at hand, joined presently by a chorus of boys' voices singing a hymn, sweet and powerful, out into the morning air. On another day I came to Wittenberg, walking past the spot where he burned the pope's bull, in through the Elster gate, into the city. In the old Augustinian cloister I looked forth from the ancient convent, from his seat, — the sash, with its small panes, for the moment thrown back, — down into a sunny court, where Johnny and Lippus and Jost no doubt made merry while Luther, with his Katherine — the champion for a moment resting — laughed at their pranks and struck up an air for them on his fiddle. This room must have seen his agony when he stood by the death-bed of Magdalene; here he must have been when he interceded for the finches

with that ruthless Wolfgang Lieberger, lying in wait with his spoiled nets in the garden close by. I stood under the gray, weather-beaten archway that resounded to his hammer as he nailed up the ninety-five theses, and read reverently the epitaph that covers his bones. Entering Eisenach through its lofty gate-tower, I went through streets where he sang, as a choir-boy, in his childhood; then climbed the rocky cliff to the gate of the Wartburg, that has stood for eight hundred years. How great memories jostle one another on that noble height! The beautiful Saint Elizabeth of Hungary; the tragic strife of the Minnesingers; Wolfram von Eschenbach, in some solitary turret, dreaming over his Parzival; the crossed swords of Gustavus Adolphus and Duke Bernard of Saxe Weimar; relics of many an illustrious prince and noble; but here as everywhere where he trod, all is subordinated to the sturdy son of the Thuringian miner. You go forward, almost impatiently, until you are shown the suit of armor that he wore as a disguise, helm and cuirass made to fit an ample head and breast. There you pause long. You are in the little room where he translated the Psalms, and struggled, as he believed, with the veritable devil. This vertebra of a mammoth was, meanwhile, his footstool; this table held the page; as he raised his eyes to the window, those lovely fields and forests, heaving up into magnificent hills, were the landscape upon which his eyes rested. Luther dominates everything at the Wartburg, and so too at Coburg. It is a stronghold scarcely less imposing. Luther was here for four months, writ-

ing in one of its rooms his greatest hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God"—the figure of that opening line suggested by the stronghold itself. Seen from the low valley of the Werra, the towering central mass, within long lines of gray, beetling wall, is full of impressive suggestion. To modern arms the castle would offer only a feeble resistance, but one can understand that in Luther's day it must have seemed of unassailable might. It has been famous in wars without number, and is steeped in history to the very battlements; but the potentates all fall into the background; their splendor, their illustrious following, the scenes of romance, the changes in the fate of nations here brought to pass, all forgotten, while the pilgrim stands breathless in the room in which once wrought the Saxon peasant. From here he dictated to the princes at Augsburg the conditions on which the fate of Europe was to rest; then leaned from the window to catch the twittering of the early birds of the spring; then thundered defiance at the devil in the manliest of songs.

But the crisis in Luther's life was at Worms. Worms lies in the Rhine plain, almost nothing remaining of its former grandeur except the ancient cathedral and still older synagogue, for Louis XIV. burnt the city to the ground. But the landscape is as of old. The Rhine winds quietly forward; eastward rises the dark outline of the Odenwald, as on the day when he rode forth from it, surrounded by hero-worshippers, and singing his defiant hymn. Here Germany has done its utmost for the man who affected her history more deeply than any other

mortal,—in the superb Luther memorial. In the public park, in the first place, there is a broad substructure of granite, forty feet square. At the four corners, on pedestals of eight feet high, stand statues of bronze, of eight and one-half feet, representing leading supporters of Luther. To the right, in the foreground, is Philip, landgrave of Hesse, leaning on his sword, a determined, manly presence; to the left is Friedrich, elector of Saxony, also a vigorous figure, holding in his hand a drawn sword. The other corners are occupied by Melancthon and Reuchlin, in scholar's caps and robes,—the former a slender figure and sharp, meagre face, the latter handsome in countenance and bearing. One side of the square is open. On the three other sides—between the statues just described—sit symbolical figures representing cities which played an important part in the convulsion of the Reformation. One is Magdeburg, with head and figure bowed, a broken sword in her hand, and a face full of pain. The city was laid waste by the Catholic leader, Tilly, with terrible devastation. One is Speyer, where a body of reformers presented a noteworthy protest, and hence began to be called Protestants. The figure sits with a face full of spirit, and arm raised, in an attitude as if it would push away something thrust upon it. The third figure represents Augsburg, calm and upright, with the palm of peace in her hand, for here it was that accommodations were reached between the rival parties.

Coming now from the outside of the square to the centre, we have the great heart of the thing.

Five statues of bronze are grouped together on a polished base of sienite, a beautiful stone of the hardest composition. One is Huss, wrapped in his gown, holding between his hands a crucifix, on which his eyes are reverently bent, — a face spare, calm, and full of devotion. Back of him sits Wickliffe, in scholar's attire, with a contemplative mien. Next is Peter Waldus, founder of the Waldensians, a picturesque beggar-monk, and in the bronze you can see the ragged edges of his frock, the rough sandals, and the coarse wrappings about his legs. But a figure finer than any yet described is that of Savonarola, the great Italian, martyred in 1498 for heroic speech. It is wonderfully living. He sits with arm uplifted; a cowl wraps the head, from which a striking, earnest face looks out, the nose and lips full of courage. One hand holds the robe at the throat, the other is thrown out in impassioned gesture. The robe falls lightly over the lower limbs, which are disposed as if the man were just springing to his feet in the ardor of his appeal. It is startling in its life-like presentment.

And now, from the midst of all, — from the princes whose power shielded him, the scholars who held up his hands, and the mighty martyrs who died that the fulness of time might come, and he and his work might live, — towers the colossal Luther. The statue is ten feet and one-half high. From the great shoulders a scholar's gown falls to the feet. One foot is advanced; his clenched right hand is on the cover of a Bible, which he holds folded in his left arm. It is as if a hallowed magnetic current from

a reservoir of supernatural power were charging his whole frame with a more than giant's force. The head is bare, the face upturned, the lips parted. That Titan Luther face ! and beneath are cut the words which he uttered before the diet, some tone of which may have been borne in the air as far as the spot where the memorial now rises : " Here I stand ; I cannot do otherwise ; God help me." It is very, very grand, commemorating gloriously as manly and consecrated a warfare waged against evil as the earth has ever seen ; and the sight of the great figures brings the whole hot battle most powerfully home to whoever stands before it,—the princes with their swords, the brows of the scholars grown spare through earnest controversy, the brandished hand of Savonarola, eloquent with denunciation, and towering highest the great shoulders of Luther ! We see the parted lips, the lines ploughed by spiritual struggle, the rugged brows, the clenched fist resting on the Bible, the figure braced back for a mighty shock, as if he beheld in the air before him rank on rank of mitred prelates and crowned rulers, and in the background the stake and fagots.

No worthier pilgrimage can be made to-day than in the footsteps of Luther. Stand in the little house where he was born ; see the humble room in which was the hearth-stone of his home, the pulpits in which he thundered, the palaces in which his sturdy presence, in his coarse scholar's robe, threw into insignificance the splendor of princes ; last of all, stand in the market-place of Worms !



CHAPTER IX.

THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR.

From the death of Luther, in 1546, to the appearing of Lessing, two hundred years later, there is little German literature which requires from us more than the briefest notice. It is proper that mention should be made of the causes which produced so long a silence ; for want of a literature to consider, let us for awhile turn to history. In the preceding chapter, allusion was made to Göthe's condemnation of Luther. It seems almost impious to call in question the value of the Reformer's work,—almost as if one should speak of the career of the Apostle Paul as a failure ; and we are not to understand, I take it, that Göthe would deny the power and sincerity of the man. Luther felt that he must break his way, in the words of that line of his mighty hymn, “through this world, with devils filled.” Never were the powers infernal more vigorously fought, and to this day we feel a tremor from the stamp of his foot. With all my heart I acknowledge the grandeur of the figure as he towers in history ; and yet we cannot open the story of the Thirty Years' War without being in a *mood* to believe that any man—whatever his virtues—who was influential in bringing upon the world that

total eclipse of things bright and good, had a hand in the infliction of a curse for which scarcely any beneficence could atone ; that the view of Göthe was not entirely without reason.

Luther's own century was a time of wrangling, rather than actual warfare. Most uncompromising and exhaustless of disputants was Luther himself, whose tongue was indeed a two-edged sword, and whose pen was dipped in gall. But tongue and pen were his only weapons, and his successors, for some generations, fought their battles in halls of debate and upon parchment fields, rather than with pike and musket. Charles V., indeed, and the princes of the Smalcaldic League fell into sterner controversy. At Mühlberg, on the Elbe, toward the middle of the century, John, elector of Saxony and head of the Protestant cause, underwent defeat ; and a little later Charles himself, with the brave and cunning Maurice of Saxony close upon his tracks, fled from Germany in haste through the passes of Tyrol. But the spirit of this time was a benignant genius in comparison with the fury who flapped woe unutterable from her gloomy wings upon the Germany of the succeeding age.

In the early years of the seventeenth century Ferdinand II. came to his own, — the headship of the hereditary states of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire. He was the mightiest prince upon the face of the earth, able and persistent, a pupil of the Jesuits, and devoted to their policy. The Bohemians, who had revolted from him, chose as their king a young potentate of Western Germany, —

Friedrich, Elector Palatine. A year or two before, this young man had gone to England, and, amid feasting and the performance of brilliant masques, which the Elizabethan poets furnished, married the lovely sister of the prince who was soon to be Charles I. Heidelberg castle is to-day a place of princely magnificence, devastated though it has been by time and powder-bursts, and nothing about the castle is fairer than the English garden, on its terrace three hundred feet above the Neckar. This was the home to which Friedrich brought his wife; here he ruled, and the Princess Elizabeth, walking in the garden laid out in her honor, with her husband's statue among the ivy on the wall above,—as it stands to-day,—could behold as lovely a domain as Heaven had ever given into the hands of a prince. When at length, however, the Bohemians offered Friedrich their crown and he hesitated, the princess is reported to have said, “Thou hast married the daughter of a king, and fearest to accept a kingly crown! I would rather eat black bread at thy royal board than feast at thy electoral table.” So Friedrich went out into the storms after a crown. Presently he was a fugitive, for Ferdinand swept through Bohemia with sword and fire, and the conflagration spread to the world outside. The Protestants were disunited, and often lukewarm. Among their leaders were brilliant soldiers, but the emperor was, for ten years, resistless. To the Rhine on the west, and northward, even throughout Denmark, his armies marched, and burned, and slew. Through

rough conversion the adherents of the Church were multiplied ; the Protestants opposed in battle order ; the emperor's armies passed ; the Protestants still were ranked in rows, but they were rows of graves. Meantime the keenest eye that ever watched the complications of politics was fixed anxiously on the course of events. Richelieu saw humiliation for France in the aggrandizement of Ferdinand, and found means to curb the conquerer.

In a room of the fortress of Coburg hang side by side the life-size portraits of two martial figures, in the military dress of two hundred and fifty years ago. One of them is the chief instrument through whom Ferdinand succeeded in making himself omnipotent in Germany,—Wallenstein, duke of Friedland ; the other is the instrument through whom, together with Richelieu, the emperor's power was broken,—Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden. The portrait of Gustavus represents a man of tall, large frame, with light hair, large, intense blue eyes, a full lower face, with the pointed mustaches and chin-beard of the time, in attire of blue and buff, set off with point-lace ; a man, one would say, of action rather than thought, with a full store of impetuous will, and sound stomach and muscles for carrying out his purposes. The healthful countenance too has suggestions of warm temper, but also of joviality ; and one thinks that the capacious doublet might upon occasion shake mightily with laughter,—a figure of bearing most manly, frank, and winning. The figure of Wallenstein is also tall, but meagre, in gloomy attire, with hair dark,

but showing a reddish tinge, a complexion somewhat sallow, forehead high rather than broad, and small, sparkling eyes, — a countenance and mien that repel approach, as the open face and bearing of the companion picture court it. Hung about the pictures are arms and armor of the time in which the two leaders played their part, — the steel caps and cuirasses, the pikes and muskets, still gleaming before the portraits as they gleamed before the living eyes of these men.

No leader ever fell more gloriously, or left behind a purer fame, than Gustavus. He fought for a grand cause, and if there was in his motive a taint of selfishness, history scarcely mentions it.¹ He was tolerant,² devout, and fearless. Perhaps no man was ever more loved. Wallenstein is a character, in a certain sense, even more fascinating, — a saturnine, inscrutable personage, — as Gustavus was cheerful and frank. Although the leader of the Catholic party, he was religionless, as the

¹ See, however, Gfrörer: *Das Leben Gustav Adolfs*.

² "Gustave Adolphe, élevé dans les sentiments étroits d'une église aussi intolérante que le Catholicisme, étonna et scandalisa ses amis d'Allemagne, en assistant à la messe. Il traita avec une rare indulgence ses plus grands ennemis, les moines, même les jésuites. Les Protestants ne comprenaient pas le héros du nord; les historiens modernes ne le comprennent pas davantage, quand ils attribuent à des calculs politiques des sentiments qui étaient l'instinct du génie. Il y a un trait qui le caractérise admirablement; il se fit aimer des Catholiques comme des Protestants, et les chroniqueurs contemporains lui sont tous également favorables, à quelque parti qu'ils appartiennent. La religion de Gustave Adolphe est la religion de l'avenir, de l'humanité. Il plane au-dessus des confessions et de leur haineuses rivalités." — F. Laurent, *Les Guerres de la Religion*.

king was religious, and given over, as the world has believed, to mysterious superstition, for want of a better faith; a practitioner of magic and patron of astrology; a man of such genius that the world gave way before him in a marvellous manner, until he was believed by others—and came probably to believe himself—a sort of superhuman being, bearing a charmed life. Although concerned with much ruthlessness, there is some reason to believe that he sought to mitigate it, and at last to bring the warfare to an end.¹ To some extent he may have felt he was absolved from ordinary human obligations, and he seemed often, in a wonderful way, shielded against the operation of natural laws. On his character and the events of his career the lights rest so wierdly that from that time to this he has always attracted romantic spirits. He won little affection from men, but by a strange force, while he repelled, he subordinated men about him by the thousand. Half the world Gustavus drew by love; the other half Wallenstein held subdued in an inexplicable awe. The two figures contrast most picturesquely in history, as they do in the pictures at Coburg. They confront one another like the two opposite poles of a magnet, about whom — while one attracted hearts, and the other beat back all other wills — the world stood polarized. Since these are the most interesting characters of the Thirty Years' War, we may look at them still longer.

Wallenstein was the son of a poor Protestant gen-

¹ Förster.

tleman, of a family that had emigrated from Germany to Bohemia. He rose from obscurity only by the most gradual steps. He studied at the University of Padua, in Italy, but left it for a soldier's life, serving first against the Turks in some most humble capacity; for not until he had been in several campaigns do we find him in command of a company of infantry. Wealth came to him by a fortunate marriage, and was rapidly swelled by prudent — perhaps unscrupulous — management. When at length a widower, a second marriage with a lady of rank lifted him still higher in the scale. With each rise very marvellous ability became more and more manifest, and at the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War he soon surpassed all by his successes. Tilly, an old Walloon in the service of the Duke of Bavaria, a pupil in war of Alva, and as able and cruel, was for a time his rival, but he was soon distanced. At length even the princes of the empire took alarm, and demanded Wallenstein's deposition. Friedland had marched and fought from Italy to the northern provinces of Denmark, from the Turkish frontier to the border of Holland, — everywhere effective. The emperor's power seemed perfectly secure, and he felt that Friedland could be spared. As Wallenstein laid down his *bâton* of command, one hundred thousand men were without a leader. He lived, withdrawn, at Prague, in a strange magnificence, which was at the same time full of gloom. Just then it was, in the year 1630, that Gustavus Adolphus stepped upon the shore of North Germany, kneeling at once among his followers to pray for the blessing

of God upon his undertaking. His coffers were well filled with the gold of France, his ranks with Swedish manhood, and he became dangerous at once. Never was the foot of conqueror more speedy ; never was the acclaim fuller upon the progress of a deliverer than that which at length went up for him. He smote the outposts,—then Tilly, now sole champion, at Leipsic, with utter overthrow. He was at once in the centre of Germany ; then, as if winged, in the South. With another dart, the Rhine was passed, and the great imperial fortresses toppled and fell like a row of child's blocks. Tilly made one more effort, at the Lech, in Bavaria ; but his army fled, and he was carried dying from the field. Great was the tumult at the court of the emperor. Would injured Wallenstein come forth from the splendor of his palace, or was there no further help ? Humbly they approached him, withdrawn and eccentric, and forth at once he came. His demand— at once acceded to — was that he was to be supreme in the host he should raise ; not even the emperor was to set foot within it, or prescribe to him a course. As he stepped forth there was no military power ; before the Swedes the armies had become fugitive. In a day, as it were, he became mighty. As the children of Hamelin followed the pied piper, so the recruiting drums of the somewhat fantastic hero had a spell to summon, hurrying from every corner of Europe, the wild spirits that swarm in times of disorder. Gustavus turned to crush him ; no less prompt than the Swede, Wallenstein met him face to face. At Nuremberg he held the fuming king in durance,

starving him slowly, refusing to draw out upon the field. Gustavus—desperate—hurled his force upon the impregnable lines of Wallenstein; the latter kept rigidly to the defensive, satisfied thus far to repel, and not destroy. Gustavus withdrew, the unconquered foe in his rear. Wallenstein marched suddenly northward, leaving his entrenchments; Gustavus was instantly upon his track, seeking his opportunity. The former reaches Leipsig, the latter Naumburg; between the two lies the little Saxon village of Lützen,—and here let us take a closer look.

I reached Leipsic on a day of doubtful weather, and went soon to the old tower of the Pleissenburg, the citadel of the town, and looked out from the summit into the wide plains. The castellan went with me to the top, and between the showers pointed out to me the memorable spots. Right here have taken place an astonishing number of the great battles of the world. The field of Jena, where the French shattered the Prussian power in 1806, is not so far away that the cannon-thunder from there might not have been heard at Leipsic; and Rossbach—perhaps Frederick's most memorable field—where Prussia shattered France in 1757, is hardly out of sight. Ten miles away, again, is the village of Gross Görschen, where, in the spring of 1813, Napoleon smote the Russians and Prussians, and did something to win back the prestige lost during the Russian campaign. All about the city, and within it, took place, in the fall of 1813, the mighty "battle of the nations," in which seven hundred thousand

combatants took part. The environing fields where this was fought lay all in the deepest peace as I looked down upon them ; in the distance the rainbows among the mist ; near at hand the broad levels, green and dripping with the abundant moisture. The grain stood everywhere, the country stretching, smooth and unbroken almost as natural prairie, to the verge of the horizon. A straight line of poplars or fruit-trees here and there marked a high-road ; now and then there was a clump of wood, or the compact roofs and steeple of a village. I could see the monument, surmounted by a cocked hat, where Napoleon stood on the decisive day, while Macdonald, Augereau and Regnier fought in front of him, outnumbered two to one ; and the castellan told how the cannonade (from, some say, two thousand pieces) sounded into his childish ears, coming muffled, as he sat shut up with his frightened mother in the city, his chin moving, as he represented the booming, like a man's whose teeth chatter with cold.

Following the old man's pointing finger again, I saw, just beyond the city's suburbs, the steeple and windmill of Breitenfeld, where, in the Thirty Years' War, the Swede, Torstenson — a cripple, who was carried about in a litter, and yet one of the most vigorous of commanders — defeated the army of the Austrian kaiser ; and where a few years before, on the same ground, fierce old Tilly first suffered defeat, and Gustavus Adolphus first made his greatness felt. To this hour, in old New England families, any piece of especial deviltry is "like old

Tilly ; ” and probably the phrase comes clear from the Puritans of 1631, who, like the rest of the Protestant world, were made to stand aghast by the sack of Magdeburg. But there is pathos as well as horror in the story of the unrelenting old tiger. He was brave and faithful and honest as he was cruel, and, in spite of all his plundering, died poor. At Dresden you may see his *bâton*, the pearl and gilding as tarnished as its former possessor’s fame. A singular figure he must have been ; generally in a Spanish doublet of bright green satin, with slashed sleeves ; on his head a little cocked hat, from which a red ostrich feather hung down his back ; under this a long nose, withered cheeks, and a heavy white mustache,—for he was past seventy. But it was more thrilling to me even than Breitenfeld, when, looking westward, I saw dimly through the mist the little steeple of Lützen, ten miles distant, where Gustavus Adolphus fell.

Leaving the tower of the Pleissenburg, I took the train to Markranstätt, a village in the suburbs, from which it was my plan to walk the league to Lützen in the long summer twilight, crossing the battle-field on the way. The high-road runs as it did two hundred years ago,—broad, white, and smooth. That evening it had been washed clean by the rain, and cherry-trees, full of ripening fruit, stood in fullest freshness on either hand. On the far-extending fields each side the grain stood high,—barley, wheat, rye, and oats rolled out in parallel strips. It was after sunset when the Lützen “Eilwagen” went past with its passengers ; the pedestrians disap-

peared one after another, and soon I was the solitary footman. The dusk kept deepening as I sauntered forward, my mind filled with thoughts of the struggle whose scene I was soon to behold. It was a dark day in November, 1632, when a heavy triple boom of cannon-thunder from Weissenfels, ten miles westward, apprised Wallenstein, lying at Leipsic, that the Austrian general at that outpost had caught sight of the advancing Swedes. Defoe, in the little-known "*Memoirs of a Cavalier*," has so photographed this stormy time that his story was long believed to come from an eye-witness. His hero—then a captive with Wallenstein in Leipsic — says: "We that were prisoners fancied the imperial soldiers went unwillingly out, for the very name of the king of Sweden was become terrible to them. Rugged, surly fellows they were," he declared. "Their faces had an air of hardy courage, mangled with wounds and scars; their armor showed the bruises of musket-bullets and the rust of the winter storms. I observed of them their clothes were always dirty, but their arms were clean and bright; they were used to camp in the open fields and sleep in the frosts and rain; their horses were strong and hardy, like themselves, and well taught their exercises." It is not hard to draw a picture of Gustavus' army as it advanced. It was a mixed host of twenty thousand. The best warriors were Swedes,—men yellow-haired and florid, marching with the vigor of troops used to success and confident in their leader; not a straggler, not a plunderer. They wore, some suits of leather, others of cloth. They carried pikes

or flint-lock muskets. One regiment was in buff, and so known as the yellow regiment; others were in blue; others in white. There was powerful cavalry, the riders half-way between the steel-covered knight of former warfare and the modern horseman. The cannon (they were the first "field-batteries") were, singularly enough, composed of cylinders of iron, cast thin for lightness, then wound round tightly with rope, from breech to muzzle, and covered at last with boiled leather. There were Germans as well as Swedes, and among these rode as leader a young man of twenty-eight, who, however, for ten years already had been a warrior of fame, and was destined to be yet more famous. His portrait too hangs by that of his teacher in war and friend—Gustavus—at Coburg, the features most handsome, and a profusion of curling brown hair falling upon the shoulders. His rusted sword too, with that of the king, hangs upon a pillar in the Wartburg, by the side of the pulpit from which Luther used to preach. It was Duke Bernhard, of Saxe-Weimar. There were also whole troops of English and Scotch, for the fame of the king drew recruits from every Protestant land, who no doubt, sometimes among psalms, hummed the quaint recruiting-song, which antiquaries tell us had a great popularity at the period, and did much to stimulate enlistment:

Germani, Suedden, Denmark are smoking
With a crew of brave lads, others provoking.
Up, lads! up, lads! up and advance,
For honor is not gotten by a cringe or a dance.

Charge, lads! fall in around,
Till Cæsar shall give ground!
Hark! hark! our trumpets sound, Tan! ta-ra-ra!
Vivat Gustavus Adolphus! we cry,
Here we shall either win honor or dy.

The king himself had a wide-brimmed hat, in which he sometimes wore a feather of green, and a suit made in great part from buff leather, with boots of wide, slouching tops. His nobles, Horn, Banier, Torstenson—famous then and afterwards, martial in aspect, but not splendid—rode beside him. As he swept along the column, the blue-eyed youths from Smaland and Gothland, and the darker Finns, grave and self-willed,—at that time his subjects,—looked at him with love and pride, and marched firmly along the muddy road, where they sank sometimes to the knee.

Here is a bit of graphic prose from the hand that gave us “Robinson Crusoe,” that will let us into what had just before been the life of this army. Gustavus is about to cross the Lech, where Tilly receives his death-wound:

“The king resolved to go and view the situation of the enemy. His majesty went out the second of April, with a strong party of horse, which I had the honor to command; we marched as near as we could to the banks of the river, not to be too much exposed to the enemy’s cannon, and having gained a little height, where the whole course of the river might be seen, the king halted and commanded to draw up. The king alighted, and, calling me to him, examined every reach and turning of the river

by his glass ; but finding the river run a long and almost straight course, he could find no place which he liked ; but at last, turning himself north, and looking down the stream, he found the river, fetching a long reach, double short upon itself, making a round and very narrow point. ‘There’s a point will do our business,’ says the king, ‘and if the ground be good, I’ll pass there ; let Tilly do his worst.’

“ He immediately ordered a small party of horse to view the ground, and to bring him word particularly how high the bank was on each side and at the point. ‘And he shall have fifty dollars,’ says the king, ‘that will bring me word how deep the water is.’ I asked his majesty leave to let me go, which he would by no means allow of ; but as the party was drawing out, a sergeant of dragoons told the king, if he pleased to let him go disguised as a boor, he would bring him an account of everything he desired. The king liked the notion well enough, and the fellow, being very well acquainted with the country, puts on a ploughman’s habit and went away immediately, with a long pole upon his shoulder ; the horse lay all this while in the woods, and the king stood, undiscerned by the enemy, on the little hill aforesaid. The dragoon, with his long pole, comes boldly down to the bank of the river, and calling to the sentinels which Tilly had placed on the other bank, talked with them ; asked them if they could not help him over the river, and pretended he wanted to come to them. At last, being come to the point where, as I said, the river makes

a short turn, he stands parleying with them a great while, and sometimes pretending to wade over, he puts his long pole into the water; then, finding it pretty shallow, he pulls off his hose and goes in, still thrusting in his pole before him, till, being gotten up to his middle, he could reach beyond him, where it was too deep; and so, shaking his head, comes back again. The soldiers on the other side, laughing at him, asked him if he could swim. He said no. 'Why, you fool, you,' says one of the sentinels, 'the channel of the river is twenty feet deep.' 'How do you know that?' says the dragoon. 'Why, our engineer,' says he, 'measured it yesterday.' This was what he wanted, but, not yet fully satisfied, 'Ay, but,' says he, 'maybe it may not be very broad, and if one of you would wade in to meet me till I could reach you with my pole, I'd give him half a ducat to pull me over.' The innocent way of his discourse so deluded the soldiers that one of them immediately strips and goes in up to the shoulders, and our dragoon goes in on this side to meet him; but the stream took the other soldier away, and he, being a good swimmer, came swimming over to this side. The dragoon was then in a great deal of pain for fear of being discovered, and was once going to kill the fellow and make off; but at last, resolved to carry on the humor, and having entertained the fellow with a tale of a tub, about the Swedes stealing his oats, the fellow, being cold, wanted to be gone; and as he was willing to be rid of him, pretended to be very sorry he could not get over the river, and so makes off.

“By this, however, he learned both the depth and breadth of the channel, the bottom and nature of both shores, and everything the king wanted to know. We could see him from the hill by our glasses very plain, and could see the soldier naked with him. Says the king, ‘He will certainly be discovered and knocked on the head from the other side; he is a fool,’ says the king, ‘if he does not kill the fellow and run off;’ but when the dragoon told his tale, the king was extremely well satisfied with him, gave him one hundred dollars, and made him a quartermaster to a troop of cuirassiers.”

This had taken place in April. It was now November, and the army, the cool quartermaster no doubt, with his troop of cuirassiers—unless the poor fellow was in the number of those who laid down their lives at Nuremberg—was pressing on to meet a foe that had long eluded them.

By nightfall that fifth of November the Swedes were at Lützen; and in the fields just beyond, the “rugged, surly fellows” of the host of Wallenstein lay waiting, the skirmishers, who had been watching the Protestant march, retiring upon the main body. Gustavus led his army south of the village in a circuit, until he had gained its eastern end, drawing it up at last in two lines a few yards south of the high-road. In the centre stood the foot, upon which perhaps the king especially relied; to the left were the Germans, under their Duke Bernhard; to the right he rode himself, at the head of the Swedish horse. In the rear was a reserve, commanded by a Scotchman; the artillery were placed

along the whole front. On the side of the imperialists, but a few rods removed beyond the road, in the darkness, there was sufficient vigilance. Wallenstein had made the ditches broader that lined both sides of the road, and filled them with skirmishers. In the centre of his line, just north of the high-road, a battery of large guns was placed, the infantry close behind in large brigades. Opposite Duke Bernhard, near a windmill, was a larger battery. At the other end of his line were cavalry, and a quantity of servants and camp-followers, whom Wallenstein compelled to arm and stand in the lines, that the Swedes might be deceived as to his strength. As Gustavus had Horn and Banier, so Wallenstein had as lieutenants, Piccolomini and Pappenheim; though the latter had been despatched with a portion of the army on an expedition. Gustavus' army numbered twenty thousand; that of Wallenstein was at first less, and couriers were despatched to recall Pappenheim, riding through the night as if for life. "The enemy is marching hitherward," wrote Wallenstein. "Break up instantly with every man and gun, so as to arrive here early in the morning. P. S. He is already at the pass and hollow road." One may still see this note in the archives at Vienna, stained with the blood of Pappenheim, who had it on him when he received his mortal wound. The poets have filled the shadows of that night before the battle with romance. The silent Wallenstein had consulted the stars before deciding to engage, and been assured by his astrologer that the planets threatened de-

struction to Gustavus in November. As he slept on the field, in the midst of the desultory firing of the outposts, he was visited by mysterious dreams.

When the late dawn came, the two armies lay wet and chilled, shrouded in a mist that was loath to rise; and it was not until eleven in the forenoon that it was clear enough for the Swedes to see the imperialist position. Then at length the king, a head taller than those of his retinue, mounted his superb white charger, a creature of superior size and beauty, — said to have been thrown in his way by his enemies, that he might become a more conspicuous mark, — and rode from troop to troop, clad simply in his suit of buff leather. I saw at Dresden the armor he left behind at Weissenfels, and which, had he worn it, might have saved his life. Plates of steel, brown in hue, the head-piece and corselet made to fit an ample brow and breast; but these the king, too intrepidly, threw aside. He alighted, knelt before his whole army, who also knelt, and, with uncovered head, prayed.¹ Then, accompanied stormily by the drums and trumpets of all the regiments, the thousands sang the great psalm of Luther, “*Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott,*” the powerful tones of the king ringing highest. Was it ever more memorably sung? Then followed a hymn which the king himself had written, “*Fear not, little flock.*” Here is a verse of it, as given by Gfrörer :

¹ According to Laurent, his exclamation on landing upon the shore of Germany was, “*La prière aide à combattre; bien prier, c’est à moitié vaincre.*”

Verzage nicht, du Häuflein klein!
 Obschon die Feinde Willens sein
 Dich gänzlich zu zerspalten;
 Gott wird durch einen Gideon
 Den er wohl weiss, dir helfen schon,
 Dich und sein Wort erhalten.¹

Most simple and manly it was in its piety. The south wind then blowing carried the thunder of the soldiers' voices to the hostile lines. The hymn died away; the voices of the priests too, who had been celebrating mass in the other host, became silent. Then came the shouts of the Swedish captains commanding the assault. The cannon on both sides opened with fury, and over the stubble of the bare field, with pike and musket, the foot sprang forward. To the ditch it was only a few steps, and there the enemy met them with obstinacy. The king sprang from his horse, — when the vigor of the attack appeared for a moment to slacken, — caught a partisan from the hand of a soldier, and went himself to the front, chiding them as he hurried through their ranks, and bidding them “stand firm at least some minutes longer, and have the curiosity to see your master die in the manner he ought, and the manner he chooses.”² At length the enemy were dislodged; the host of men, pursuers and pur-

¹ Fear not, O little flock! although
 Against thee burst the furious foe,
 Thee quite to sunder aiming;
 For God shall, through some Gideon
 Whom He well knows, with succor run,
 Thee and His word maintaining.

² Harte: Life of Gustavus.

sued, streamed across the high-road into the farther field. The dark host of Piccolomini's cuirassiers charged toward them. "Grapple with these black fellows!" cried the king to the colonel of the Finland horse. There was clash and tumult; in another moment the smoking battery at Wallenstein's centre was in Swedish hands, and presently three of the brigades of infantry were in confusion. Wallenstein himself here came riding forward, on the red steed which he mounted as the fight became hot. His usual dress in the field—which he probably wore on this day—was a coat of elk-skin, a red scarf, a richly-embroidered cloak of scarlet, a gray hat with red feathers, and about his neck the order of the Golden Fleece. Behind him galloped a body of chosen horse, who obeyed him as if he had been a demi-god.

Wallenstein's dress was again and again shot through. Step by step the Swedes were forced backward, the cannon recaptured. The battle became a wild *mêlée*, where the intermingled combatants fought, for the most part, with pike and musket-butt, until at length the assailants were driven beyond the road once more, and stood at last a broken company, on the ground from which they had advanced. Lützen, close by, was now in flames, and Bernhard's Germans were sorely harassed by the fire of the guns from the windmill. The king, however, charging at the head of the Swedish horse, threw into confusion the imperialist left; then, hearing of Bernhard's danger and the repulse of the centre, he set out on the gallop to

stay the reverse. His horse was powerful. He leaped the ditches at the roadside, the regiment of Smalanders galloping after him. His pace, however, was so rapid that he left them behind, and only one or two of his retinue could keep up with him. He was near-sighted, and in his ardor went too near the enemy's line. "That must be one of their leaders," said an imperialist corporal; "fire upon him." There was shooting at close quarters, and a ball pierced the king's arm. Faint with pain, he reeled a little in the saddle. "The king is bleeding! the king is bleeding!" cried the approaching dragoons. Leaning upon the duke of Saxe-Lauenburg, Gustavus besought him to get him to one side. They avoided the press by a little *détour*, which, however, carried them again too near the enemy. There was further firing; the pallid and tottering king gasped out, "My God! my God!" and fell from his horse, pierced through and through. His foot hung in the stirrup, and his horse, likewise wounded, dragged him farther among the enemy, where he was again shot, exclaiming, as he gave up the ghost, "My God! my God! Alas, my poor queen!" A murderous fight took place over his body as he lay. Now the Croats were in possession,—swarthy ruffians, such as one sees still in Austrian uniforms in the towns along the Danube, as he goes toward Vienna. Now the Swedes had the advantage, only to be driven off again, until the heap of bodies grew high above the king, and neither friend nor foe knew longer where he lay. The body had been stripped, how-

ever, and the doublet, pierced with bullet-holes and stained with blood, is still shown at Vienna. A turquoise of extraordinary size, which he wore attached to a chain, — perhaps as a talisman, — one of the crown jewels of Sweden, has never been recovered. The white steed, covered with blood, and mad with his wounds, galloping along the line, gave the army the first intimation that misfortune had befallen the king. There was some talk of retreat, but Duke Bernhard, himself wounded in the arm, rode to the front. In the presence of the army — for the moment appalled — he ran through and through with his sword the commander of the Smalanders, who had guarded the king too negligently. The Swedes, recovering heart in a moment, before the decision of the new leader, stormed madly forward; the voice of the king's blood seemed to cry to them from the ground; and German and Scot, Hollander and Englishman, were not far behind. Over the road again they poured in a torrent; the battery, already taken and retaken, smutched and heated with incessant discharge, was again in their hands. The guns at the windmill were captured; troop after troop, put utterly to rout, fled toward Leipsic. In vain Piccolomini exposed himself, until seven horses were killed under him, and he was wet with his own blood. The spell of Wallenstein himself seemed broken. Wierd as a demon, he moved in the tumult, invulnerable to bullet and pike-thrust, as if he really were a shade, or smeared with the ointment of hell, which many believed he had at com-

mand. The powder-wagons in the rear roared into the air in a sudden explosion, raining balls and bursting bombs in every direction. All was on the brink of utter rout, when, with galloping hoofs and corselets reflecting the late afternoon light, the horse of Pappenheim — six fierce, fresh regiments — rushed upon the field; their leader rode ahead, a most impetuous chieftain, whose brow it was said, when he was on fire with battle, bore in deep crimson the mark of two sabres crossed. You may see at Dresden the *bâton* which he carried as field-marshal; and now, no doubt, while the fighting sabres were flaming on his forehead, pointed forward to mark the path for his troopers. The Swedes were outnumbered and exhausted by their successes, but a fight of utter recklessness went forward. The ghost of the dead king seemed to hover in the battle-smoke. With a sort of demon grandeur, Wallenstein, in his red attire, towered in the tumult, with an eye that burned upon the fray with — as his host had some reason to think — a supernatural flame. His retinue were all shot down; a cannon-ball tore the spur from his heel; several musket-balls were found to have lodged in the folds of his dress. It was a confusion of blood, shrieks, prayers, curses. “It was wonderful to see how (among the Swedes) the whole yellow regiment, after half an hour, in the same beautiful order in which it had stood living, lay dead by its arms,”¹ and the Gothland and Smaland blues had fought also to an exter-

¹ Khevenhüller.

mination as utter. The Swedes were driven back to their position of the morning. As the twilight, however, was giving way to darkness, they advanced again, and fought until—in the November blackness—friend could no longer be told from foe. Wallenstein, like a baffled goblin, withdrew silently in the gloom, without standards, without artillery, the soldiers almost without arms, bearing with him Pappenheim, who had saved him, at the last gasp, from a mortal wound. In the darkness the Swedish Colonel Oehm heard a voice commanding him to “follow to Leipsic.” It was a messenger from Wallenstein, who mistook his regiment for Hoffkirk’s imperialists; and then first the Swedes knew that the foe had yielded.¹ One-fourth of all engaged had been slain outright; and as to wounded, in the host of Wallenstein scarcely a man was unhurt. The Swedes encamped close upon the field. They hunted with lanterns among the corpses, in the low-hanging gloom, until at length they found the king, face downward, close by a great stone, naked, gashed, trampled. The great stone on the plain of Lützen, long before the time of the battle, had had a notoriety, perhaps been an object of some reverence. It is a solitary boulder, brought hither by natural forces, or perhaps by human hands, to lie here alone,—whence and for what, no man can say. But since that day, mention of the “Schwedenstein” comes in again and again in history and poetry, coupled with solemn lamenting, until, through asso-

¹ *Harte.*

ciation, the words, to a German ear, have come to have almost the sound of moaning. The king's corpse was carried, by torch-light, accompanied by a little retinue of troopers, in an ammunition-wagon, to a village in the rear of the Swedish line, where it was laid before the altar of the little church. The village school-master tells the story; how a simple service took place, conducted by himself and a trooper yet covered with the dust and sweat of battle; then how, while the body lay at length on a table in a peasant's house, he made a plain coffin, in which the hero was borne to his weeping queen at Weissenfels.¹

I went alone over the plain of Lützen, the twilight deepening at every step, bearing in my mind the story I have told. The rattle of the wheels from the receding Eilwagen had long been hushed; there was no footfall on the highway but my own. Between the rows of trees at length I saw dimly the buildings of Lützen, and knew I had reached the spot. I waited in the road until the night had wholly set in. The moon, behind a thin cloud, gave a ghostly light; there was now and then a lightning flash in the horizon, and a sullen roll of thunder, like the sound of distant cannon. I looked out upon the fields to the north, showing faint and mysterious, — those in which Wallenstein had lain when in the black darkness he dreamed, or awoke to deal with charms and incantations; whence on the morrow, as the mist cleared, he looked across and be-

¹ Gfrörer.

held the bareheaded Swedes upon their knees. There it was that he rode, stern and calm, with his invulnerable breast. I was now on the spot where the fight had been fiercest, on the broad level of the high-road, alone where those thousands had struggled. I tried to call up a vision of the swarming Norsemen, yellow-haired and vigorous, with frames and courage exercised in the woods and fiords that had nursed the sea-kings before them. It must have been just here that the yellow regiment lay dead, all ranked as they stood; and just here the blues. It was here that the cannon-wheels furrowed the sod; and it was yonder that Pappenheim burst in with his sweating horses and remorseless sabres.

I left the road and went down into the field to the south, in a spot where the grain had been reaped, and stood where the Protestant line stood when their hearts heaved as they prayed with the king, and shook the air with their manly chanting. Here it must have been that he flung himself from his horse, and went forward, pike in hand, when the foot hesitated; and now at length I came to the great stone at the foot of which they found the king's body. It rose in the plain, two feet or so above the soil, gray, indistinct under the moon, dumb, but eloquent. I thought of the stain that had lain among the lichens there; the cold mist charged heavily with the sulphurous reek of the combat; the Swedes, weeping and wounded, searching wearily among the corpses with their lanterns; then, at last, throwing their arms, stiff with smiting,

about their golden hero,¹ stretched, tall and noble, just in front.

It was all wild and solemn as a scene in Ossian,—the solitude, the low thunder, the dimness of the night, the sad moan of the wind, the lightning like the red blade of a war-god suddenly brandished. The moon, cold and pale, sinking toward the west, fell back in a faint, blue reflection from a little pool among the furrows, as if the great turquoise lay there that is said to have vanished from the earth with the king's life. It was a night for the phantoms to appear and fight the battle over again. It was late when I went on, at last, into the deserted street of the little village. At the inn my mind was too full for quiet sleep; if my eyes closed, 'twas to dream of smoking torches, in the hands of men covered with dust and blood, and shining on the king's body; of the clatter of hammers driving coffin-nails; and of Wallenstein, red and spectral, like the wild huntsman, swallowed up in the gloom and storm of the dismal night.

If the ghosts of great men revisit the spots memorable to them during their earthly strivings, towering shades they are that encounter one another on that Lützen high-road. Just here it was that Charles XII., that iron-sided Swede, pitched his camp when Northern Europe was his foot-ball. Here again, in 1757, marched an army in cocked hats, high black gaiters coming to the knees, and hair gathered in queues. With the vanguard rode a man straight

¹ The Italians called him "Re d'Oro," from the color of his hair.

and stiff, with a steely eye, in which the light glittered cold and blue as on a bayonet. Nothing marked him as a leader but the star on his breast. It was Frederick the Great, about to deploy upon the field of Rossbach. Still again, in May, 1813, here was marching a column of Frenchmen,—a slender line, stretching several leagues. It was struck suddenly on the flank by the Russians and Prussians, and nearly cut in two. Thirteen thousand French died to prevent it; for the long column, leaving the high-road, swept down into the fields toward the danger, and grappled with it long and doubtfully. The Imperial Guard had bivouacked at the great stone of Lützen; and it was precisely there that Napoleon, flat on his belly, studying a map, rose to listen to the sudden cannonade to the right; then, presently after, his genius working at its brightest, galloped off into the fire. If such shades ever walk, they may well walk there. If precedence is given to him that was noblest, they will all yield to the lofty Swede who prayed as he fought. Close by the earth-shaking Corsican will move the wizard Bohemian, whose sword was wielded as well, cut as keenly, swept as far, and might have completed the parallel by becoming also an imperial sceptre, but for the intervention of the assassin.

In the careers of both Gustavus and Wallenstein, the battle of Lützen is the crisis. To one it brought death; to the other the fulness of fame and power. Moreover, in the battle of Lützen we may see the whole of the Thirty Years' War. In Göthe's theory of the metamorphosis of plants, we are taught that

every part of the plant is a repetition of one type, and that is the leaf. Bark and bough, stamen, pistil, petal, are but modified leaves, the plant throughout and during its whole existence being made up of nothing else. By a very dismal morphology, such a leaf is Lützen; modify it and repeat it over and over again, and you have the Thirty Years' War. Now it was the horrible sack of a city, now the hurling from windows of obnoxious members in a parliamentary assembly, now some outburst of gloomiest fanaticism, anon an exhibition of noble piety and sacrifice. But Lützen is the type of it all. The same persistence, the same awful hatred, the waste, the bloodshed, the hymns, the prayers, the blasphemies, raging forward from first to last during those terrible years, until the land was well-nigh consumed. It is worth while, then, to consider the event, as has been done, quite narrowly. Lützen was scarcely more than a drawn battle; the generalship of Wallenstein was perhaps fully equal to that of Gustavus. Throughout the first part of the action the duke held the king in check with perhaps scarcely more than half his number. When darkness came, it can hardly be said that the advantage was with the Protestants. Wallenstein indeed withdrew without artillery and standards, but the Swedes were too crippled to stir in pursuit, and the loss of the king was greater than that of a dozen armies. Oxenstiern, however, the great chancellor of Sweden, remained for the cabinet; Bernhard, Horn, Banier, and Torstenson for the field, — pupils of the king, who did honor to their master. The end was not yet.

Wallenstein withdrew from Leipsic, making princely gifts to the captains and corps who had done well in the battle, and sternly punishing such as had been dilatory. During the winter he recruited and reformed his army, and in the spring, when he opened his last campaign, this was his pomp, as described by an eye-witness: "The train announced the man who, in power and splendor, vied even with the emperor himself. The procession consisted of fourteen carriages, each drawn by six horses; twenty cavaliers of rank attended on Wallenstein's own person, and a hundred and twenty liveried servants followed in the suite. All the court attendants were dressed in new scarlet and blue uniforms; and ten trumpeters, sounding their silver-gilt trumpets, opened the way. All the baggage-wagons were covered with gilt leather; the greatest order prevailed in the establishment, and every person knew exactly what was his place and what were his duties. The duke himself was dressed in a horseman's buff coat; and the entire scene resembled more a victor's triumph than the march of a lately baffled commander."

A mystery hangs over the short remnant of Wallenstein's life which has never been penetrated. He was omnipotent in his army, trusted to the full by the emperor; now that Gustavus was gone, opposed by no leader who could match him. Henceforth, however, his career has no glory; his force gives way to supineness and vacillation. It was not decay of power; what was it? He was a puzzle even to the ablest and best-informed of his contemporaries. Oxenstiern declared that the motives of Wallenstein

were too mysterious for him to penetrate. He spared the Protestant Saxons ; played fast and loose in negotiations with the Swedes ; bore himself haughtily toward the imperial court, until the latter resolved upon his downfall. By secret machinations his host was taken from him ; and at length, while at Eger, a fortress on the frontier between Bavaria and Bohemia, in February, 1634, the end came. Through the agency of Colonel Buttler, an Irish mercenary, his confidants, Illo and Terzky, were slain at a banquet. A few moments later the ruffians burst into the solitary room where Wallenstein brooded, as usual, by himself, over his purposes. He deigned to utter no word of expostulation ; standing in cold dignity, with arms extended, he received the halberd-thrust. He passed away, his life all unexplained, as incomprehensible as the sphinx.

Wallenstein was dead. To excuse the deed, the imperial court declared that he had meditated treason ; that his purpose had been to lead his army over to the enemy, and, at the head of both, seize upon the sovereignty. This view is the one which has been generally entertained, many Protestant authorities believing that, in the reconstituted empire, he meant to exercise a tolerant rule, giving to all the blessings of peace. Förster, a writer of our own century, who had access to documents heretofore kept secret at Vienna, declared that he meditated no treason, but was sacrificed by the court simply because he had sickened of war, and baffled the ruthless policy which the court prescribed. Hurter, on the other hand, who writes in the in-

terest of the Catholics and the court of Austria, has drawn his character in the darkest colors, representing him as the evil demon of Germany.¹ The first modern authority in historical investigation, Von Ranke, who has lately treated the subject, cannot be definite, and is forced to leave many important points undecided. "If one," he declares, "reads Förster and Hurter, he sees that we stand to-day, although somewhat better instructed, just as at first. What one maintains, the other denies."

One is glad to think there is reason for considering Friedland, at the last, at any rate in some ways noble as well as able. He was nursed in the warfare of his time, the instrument of cruelties which we can hardly endure to hear of. *Perhaps* he tried to mitigate the horrors of the warfare, dying at length in an effort to establish peace and a tolerance that was far before his time. I find him called the greatest figure of his time, and so set above Gustavus. It was indeed the case that the king was born absolute monarch of a race of brave men; Wallenstein began in the ranks, or scarcely above,—the son of a man poor and obscure. Weighted though he was, he confronted the king, at the height of his fame, as powerful as he. Such was his might that men said he had bought it of the devil, and paid for it with his own soul. It is not strange that romantic natures have become absorbed in him, and that painters and poets have considered him an attractive subject. Schiller has founded upon his story a tragedy

¹ Die Geschichte Wallensteins.

which has been declared the greatest drama since the time of Shakespeare.¹ In a future chapter the trilogy of "Wallenstein" will be considered with some care.

In the "Neue Pinacothek," at Munich, a picture that attracts the attention of all is the "Death of Wallenstein." With outstretched arms, as he fell, lies the murdered leader, while over him stands his astrologer and bosom companion, Seni, whose passionless face seems to say that it was fixed by fate, and that he has read it all beforehand in the courses of the stars. Still more powerful is another picture, to be seen elsewhere, in which Friedland is represented as just entering the fortress of Eger on the eve of his assassination. It is by the artist Piloty, who has embodied in a wonderful manner in his work the tragical gloom of his hero's character and career. The circumstances are those of a magnificent military cavalcade, and yet in some indescribable way they suggest the terrible. In the foreground is a church-yard, past which the procession is moving. From a yawning, half-finished grave the grave-digger seems to beckon to Wallenstein, sitting in his litter, with anxious face resting upon his hand. Through the sky, darkened by clouds, the ravens swoop, filling the air, as it were, with gloomy boding. The troopers who precede the litter in which the duke is borne, their backs only seen, seem indescribably to betoken the averted favor of the world; while the figure of Buttler, riding behind, though,

¹ De Quincey.

if looked at, only that of a stern soldier of the period, is yet so rigid, so ominously dark in its features, that it irresistibly suggests an avenging fate.

The leaders were gone, but the war raged forward. What became of the magnificent Germany of the old time, which Karl the Great had founded, which the Hohenstauffen had loved and ruled, and which had waxed gloriously forward until it was everywhere dotted with free cities among the well-tilled leagues? From the rich river valleys up into the hills had swept the vineyards and corn-fields, and past them poured the great convoys of the merchants from foreign lands; in the many-hued society had stood in full ranks the nobles, the sturdy burghers, the millions of the peasantry. Thirty years of devastation and the black forests were growing over it once more, from which a thousand years before it had been redeemed; no longer the song of the laborers, but the bark of the wolves which had come back to tenant the new-made desert; in place of towers and homes, ash-heaps that were full of skeletons! That suit of armor at Dresden, left behind in Weissenfels, ten miles from Lützen, because the pressure of the cuirass was somewhat heavy on an old wound! Had Gustavus worn it, instead of the doublet of buff leather, who knows what agony might have been saved the world? So too, but for the pike-thrust of Buttler's ruffians, might Wallenstein have blocked the path of the heavy-footed horror.

The literature of the period whose history we

have reviewed, from the death of Luther to the middle of the eighteenth century, requires only brief consideration. At the death of the great reformer, there were not wanting in Germany writers of ability. Ingenious minds at this period still threshed the straw of the scholastic philosophy; but there were gifted men, in their lifetime persecuted as necromancers, who were beginning to break a path for modern physical science,—the most famous representative of whom was Paracelsus. There were no poets better than certain honest but dreary Mastersingers, excepting that now and then, from some earnest Protestant pastor, came a devout hymn. A historian sometimes appears a little better than a bare annalist. Above all, the minds of men were agitated upon questions of theology, and vast libraries were written for and against dogmas for which the world has ceased to care.

The dreamer Böhme must be mentioned,—like the Nuremberg Mastersinger, a cobbler,—whose name has come to be revered by all mystical thinkers. Little of the literary work of this time was done in German. The centres of culture—at first the monasteries, then the courts of princes, then the cities—were now the universities, which, with the revival of learning, had been founded in many parts of the land. To a large extent we must ascribe it to pedantry—that poor vanity of scholars which leads to a display of attainments—that the learned men turn their backs upon their wholesome, honest mother-tongue. To be sure, a certain convenience came from the circumstance that since Latin was

recognized as the only language fit for scholars, the refined men of different lands could, through this, make themselves intelligible to each other. But it is very plain that those who should have been guides and teachers seemed to take an unworthy pleasure in separating themselves from the world of plain men and women, by writing and talking in a language unintelligible to them,—showing a spirit, in this respect, as far as possible from that of Luther, whom they in most things professed to reverence. The affectation went so far that it was the fashion to be ashamed even of their plain German names, which must be exchanged for, or modified into, Greek or Latin designations. Hondt, Turmair, Von Hohenheim, Schwarzerd, became Canisius, Aventinus, Paracelsus, Melanchthon. They were sometimes men of power, and worked with industry, but their accomplishment was stored up in the dead tongue. For a judgment upon them, oblivion has buried most of them, while the poetic shoemakers and vagabond lampooners, whom they utterly despised, are remembered, and sometimes held in honor.

At the end of the century appears a man who must be mentioned more at length. To Johann Fischart the high praise is accorded of mirroring in himself the intellectual life of the last half of the sixteenth century,—as Luther the first.¹ He possessed extraordinary power, various and thorough knowledge, and an excellent purpose. Whether he was born in Mainz or Strassburg is a matter of un-

¹ Kurz.

certainty. He travelled widely, and toward the end of his life lived in Speyer, as an advocate of the imperial court. Soon after his death he was almost forgotten, although during his lifetime he had attained a high celebrity. His great significance has found recognition only in our own day. He was not only a well-read man, like Hans Sachs, but a great scholar; his nature was thoroughly noble, freedom being the watchword of his life. He showed great ability in satire. It is plain that he loves his race, though he uncovers unsparingly human weaknesses and defects. His greatness and many-sidedness are most apparent in his prose, though his position as a poet is honorable.

While the armies were clashing at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, a certain versifier, Martin Opitz von Boberfeld, appeared, becoming the centre of a group of mediocre poets known as the "First Silesian School." Opitz deserves this praise: that he loved his native tongue, sought to improve it, while making it the vehicle of his own thoughts, and used all his influence — which came to be considerable — to bring it into honor.¹ Lohenstein and Hoffmanswaldau, a little later, are centres of the "Second Silesian School," whose characteristics may be summed up in the one word "worthlessness." It is pleasant to turn from this barrenness to a department of poetry in which the sad years during and following the Thirty Years' War show a really rich yield. From the long agony of the German nation were wrung a body of the noblest hymns. It has been well said that the most significant fact of the period

¹ See Appendix, note A.

is that its truest literary achievements are in a department in which no other Aryan people has excelled, and which is really as alien to the German as to the French and English intellect.¹ The hymns of Paul Flemming, and especially of Paul Gerhardt, surpass even those of their English contemporaries, George Herbert and Vaughan,—deserving to be classed with those of Luther, and only inferior to the great Hebrew outbursts. Gerhardt, a Lutheran pastor, long resident in Berlin,—losing his place through his opposition to certain plans of the Great Elector,—was a model of piety. He wrote one hundred and twenty songs, which are outpourings of the truest devoutness, almost without exception faultless examples of the poetry of religion.

The prose of the seventeenth century offers still less that is worthy of attention than the poetry. Those who wrote, in large majority, preferred to use Latin, even when their knowledge of that language was most imperfect; where German was the medium, it was so interlarded with foreign expressions that it became scarcely recognizable as German, the mongrel result receiving from Leibnitz the name of “*Misch-masch*.” If it were the history of philosophy, instead of *belles-lettres*, that was our subject, a large space would be needed for the great name of Leibnitz. Like the scholars of his time in general, however, he turned his back on his native tongue, writing little except in Latin and French. It deserves to be mentioned that he did so unwill-

¹ Sime's *Life of Lessing*.

ingly, in the idea that circumstances forced him to it. A paper in German, in which he criticised severely the "Misch-masch" of his time, and pleaded earnestly for the culture of his native language, is one of the light streaks amid the darkness. Other such streaks are that his disciple Wolf thought it worth while to spread abroad his master's theories in German; and that a bold professor at Halle (Thomasius) ventured, amid the execrations of the learned world, to lecture to his students in their mother tongue.

The two hundred years from the death of Luther to the middle of the eighteenth century are a time of night, not absolutely rayless, but full of gloom most oppressive. England saw meanwhile the Elizabethan period, France the age of Louis XIV. But the land so long silent and dark was to be glorified in its turn by the sun-burst.



PART II.—THE SECOND PERIOD OF BLOOM.

CHAPTER X.

LESSING.

We have considered the dreariness of the Thirty Years' War, and the long period of exhaustion which followed, during which, in literature, so few names appear deserving of mention. We have now reached the eighteenth century. In one state of Germany, at least, a strong man has appeared as ruler whose work has done something toward lifting the Germans from their depression. The great elector, at the end of the seventeenth century, has laid the foundations of the power of Prussia, giving place, at his death, to the first king, who in turn gives way to the memorable Frederick William I. The reader of Carlyle's Frederick will retain forever the vivid portrait of the coarse, rugged, eccentric—sometimes almost insane—old monarch, who yet possessed a certain heroism, and set in some ways, for a corrupt time, an example of honesty. When the sceptre falls from his hand it is grasped by the great Frederick, a soul no less marked for command than the mightiest leaders. With him Prussia becomes great; the rest of Germany, however, continues to languish, a figure with noble traits, like that of Maria Theresa, and Karl August of Weimar, now and then appearing, but the rulers for the

most part the most despicable of their class, devoid of patriotism, rotten with vices, unscrupulous in tyranny, — to the extent of selling their subjects for foreign wars like sheep for the shambles. France, towering to the west, subordinates everything. When the glory of Louis XIV. is extinguished, the prestige of the foreigner is undiminished; for the most part, in the hundred petty courts of Germany, we behold a world of apes, whose talk, whose dress, whose manners, whose revolting vices, are patterned after those of the riotous society which was ground to pieces at length for its sins between the jaws of a monster, — the French revolution.¹

Before the middle of the eighteenth century a critic and poet appears in Leipsic — Gottsched — who, although himself an imitator, and seeing no possibilities for German literature except by following in the track of France, was in several ways helpful; perhaps he was most so as an obstacle to be striven against by the champions who needed some such gymnastic to help them in the acquisition of strength, — champions destined to bring in a better time. In opposition to Gottsched — who was of sufficient importance to become the centre of a considerable school — stood certain Swiss writers living at Zürich, Bodmer and Breitinger; also men who came to have many adherents, who liked English models, as Gottsched liked the French, and who also brushed the dust off of some of the long-forgotten treasures, holding them up to be admired and

¹ Vehse: Geschichte der europäischen Höfe.

imitated; in particular they brought to light the long-lost Nibelungen Lied. We must not forget the real deserts of these pioneers,—discredited and superseded though they were as time went on. Through Gottsched the fantastic unnaturalness of the Second Silesian School was overcome. The effort of these affected writers after pompous and learned periods had produced a style than which nothing could be worse; in opposition to which the Leipsig critic, though with a theory in some ways quite erroneous, strove for purity, and a dignity that should not be stilted. The great writers of the age of Louis XIV. had but just passed away, and it was natural that Gottsched should have seen in them the best models for the writers of his own race. He found little in English literature worthy of notice, and felt, with Voltaire, that even Shakespeare was a wild barbarian, whose genius could not atone for his rudeness. The Swiss, on the other hand, Bodmer and Breitinger, liked the English. They established a periodical after the plan of the “Spectator;” they found fault with French writers as too formal and artificial, and demanded nature. All this Gottsched fought valiantly; he was really a stalwart character, having in him the stuff of a soldier; indeed, he had to flee from home in his youth to avoid the recruiting officers, who saw in him material for a grenadier. He declared that English poets would never receive recognition in Germany,—much less be imitated,—sounding all the time the praises of the French. Before giving up Gottsched I must quote from the autobiography of Göthe an

amusing account of a visit paid by him in his youth to Gottsched, when the prestige of the literary magnate was as yet unbroken :¹

“ I shall never forget our introduction at Gottsched’s ; it was characteristic of the man. He lived in a handsome first-floor at the ‘ Golden Bear.’ The old book-seller had given him these apartments for life, in consideration of the benefits arising to his business from the works of his guest. We were announced. The servant told us his master would be with us immediately, and showed us into a spacious room. Perhaps we did not comprehend a sign he made us. We thought he was directing us into an adjoining chamber, on entering which we beheld a whimsical scene. Gottsched appeared at the same instant, at an opposite door. He was enormously corpulent. He wore a damask dressing-gown lined with red taffeta. His monstrous bald head was bare, contrary to his intention, for his servant rushed in at the same instant, by a side door, with a long wig in his hand, the curls of which descended below the shoulders. He presented it to his master with a trembling hand. Gottsched, with the greatest apparent serenity, took the wig with his left hand, with which he dexterously fitted it to his head, while with his right hand he gave the poor fellow a most vigorous box on the ear, which sent him to the door in a pirouette, like a valet in a play, after which the old pedagogue, turning to us with an air of dignity, requested us to be seated, and

¹ Dichtung und Wahrheit.

conversed with us very politely for a considerable time."

The bluff old autocrat played a part somewhat similar to that of his contemporary in England, Dr. Samuel Johnson, whom he seems to have resembled in his person and some of his traits. Unlike his English counterpart, however, the German potentate was dethroned and set aside, even in his lifetime, in a way that is pathetic. In the middle of the century, however, his prestige was unbroken, and there was no thought in literature or social life but of servilely following the French precedents. In 1750, Voltaire, writing from Potsdam, just after his arrival in Prussia, could say, "I find myself in France here. Our language alone is spoken. German is only for soldiers and horses; it is only necessary for the journey." A young man just in that year twenty-one years old was already beginning to break a path for something better.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born at Kamenz, in Saxony, descended on both sides from lines of Lutheran pastors, — men who had fought in the stern battle of the faiths during the years of trial, the while wrestling in mind with many a theological subtlety, transmitting at last an extraordinary sharpness and stoutness to the boy Gotthold. His father was a man of decided intellectual power. His mother, unlike the mothers of most distinguished men, was a person not at all remarkable in mind or character. At twelve he was sent to a school endowed from the funds of a suppressed monastery,

where his brightness was so apparent that the master said he was a horse that must have double fodder. He seized upon everything within his reach,—Latin, Greek, several modern languages, and mathematics, in which latter study he was especially proficient. At seventeen he went to the University of Leipsic. His father, the pastor of Kamenz, his mother,—who, like the Scotch good-wife, could appreciate no eminence except that her son “should wag his pow in a pu’pit,”—wished him to study theology, but for this he had slight inclination, giving himself with great zeal to the study of general literature. He early began to struggle out of the limits within which his friends desired to confine him. In the society of Leipsic—in which, as a brilliant youth, he soon became somewhat known—he grew conscious of awkwardness, and, for the sake of bodily training, took lessons in riding, fencing, and dancing. It was a still further departure from what seemed propriety in the family of a Lutheran pastor of those days when he began to associate with the members of a theatrical troupe. The drama attracted him in fact beyond everything. In his boyhood he had read Plautus and Terence with especial delight. He aspired himself to dramatic authorship, and believing that a successful playwright must know the stage thoroughly, he sought the theatre. The trouble of the parents was further aggravated when they learned, besides, that there was among his associates a certain free-thinking youth, a few years the senior of Gotthold, who had left Kamenz in bad repute. The son was sum-

moned home, but made it soon appear that he had not been wasting his time. The pastor was really learned and discriminating, and soon discovered in the boy rich treasures of thorough and manifold knowledge. They had been gained in somewhat unusual ways, but Gotthold easily got permission to return to Leipsic. Even thus early he was rising into fame. Leipsic, the home of Gottsched, was the seat of much literary activity. The young men of the university were encouraged to write, and Lessing's contributions to journals had attracted attention. We presently find him in Berlin; then, to please his father, in Wittenberg, which had a more orthodox reputation; but the place was cramped, and his life became intolerable there. Berlin was again sought, where we soon find him joined in close friendship—destined to last through life—with a company of brilliant young men, several of whom rose with him into fame. The most noticeable one among them was a certain young clerk in a silk factory, with whom he often played chess, who afterwards was known as one of the best thinkers and purest characters of his time, — Moses Mendelssohn.

Lessing's course was somewhat erratic,—not through instability of character, but force of circumstances. Now he is for a time at Leipsic, now again in Berlin, now accompanying a young merchant on a journey, in the course of which they reach Holland. He is constantly busy; his powers of acquirement are extraordinary; his memory is wonderful. He provides for himself the “double

fodder" which his old teacher foresaw was a necessity for him, and develops into commensurate intellectual stature and strength. Meantime his fame constantly grows as the master of remarkable erudition, and a style as remarkable in force and point. His papers are sometimes critical, sometimes fables, poems, dramas. His life no doubt shocked the conventionalities of those days, and caused much anxiety in the parsonage at home. Some of his lyrics written at this time are lawless to the verge of license. His impulses, however, were noble, and his work for the most part directed to worthy ends. No son was ever more dutiful and generous, pinched though he was himself by great poverty. At length, during the Seven Years' War, he appears at Breslau, in Silesia, secretary of Tauentzien, the general in command,—a position of responsibility, and not at all a literary one,—in which he remains five years, showing good capacity for affairs, and creating the impression that he has forsaken the life of a scholar and writer. There was indeed little enough encouragement in that direction. Prussia was a camp merely; Austria little better; Silesia and Saxony lying between, war-worn regions, any one of whose plains might see to-morrow the shock of contending armies. It marks grandly the superiority of Lessing that in the turmoil, although recognizing the powers and respecting the harsh virtue of Frederick, no narrow considerations affect him. His sympathies are broad as the world, and he labors to melt into brotherly feeling the national and class prejudices everywhere rife about him. He was far

enough from having given up his old pursuits. At the beginning of his Breslau life he wrote, "I will for a time spin round myself like an ugly caterpillar, that I may be able to come to light again as a brilliant butterfly." That he spun to some purpose will presently appear. Note must be made here of what is the worst blot upon his fame. At Breslau he developed a passion for gambling, which became so excessive that Mendelssohn almost gave him up for lost; and even Tauentzien, a frank and manly soldier, expostulated. Without attempting to excuse the fault, it is right to say that in the society of the last century gaming was regarded with quite different eyes from at present. What Lessing sought was excitement,—no sordid end. He might easily have grown rich in his office, but was too honest.

When the war is done, Lessing promptly resumes his old career, although it offers him little hope of emolument,—indeed of a bare livelihood,—and presently appear two masterpieces, each in a different field, which he has silently elaborated during his years at Breslau. The butterfly bursts forth from its cocoon. The one is "*Minna von Barnhelm*," the first proper German comedy, the other "*Laokoon*," the best work of German criticism. By these his position was established as the first writer of Germany.

In those days there was no reading public, which, by buying an author's books, could make him independent. In Germany, as in England, only such writers could keep their heads above water as could

secure the patronage of the great. The fine independence of character of Lessing made impossible to him even the slight degree of complaisance which, with his conspicuous merits, would have secured him ease. He rejected the professorship of eloquence at Königsberg because every year he must write a eulogy upon the king. Thrift would in all probability have followed only a little fawning,—all the easier for Lessing, since he really felt the monarch's greatness. But he adhered to his manhood and his poverty. It is a strange inconsistency in Frederick that, keen as he was, thorough German, and regenerator of Germany too, he remained through life obstinately blind to the worth of the literature of his land, which, phoenix-like, before his very eyes, swept from its ashes with flight so majestic into the empyrean. The hope at Königsberg failed. The fine prize of the librarianship at Berlin was most unworthily bestowed upon an obscure Frenchman. As the only thing that offered, the illustrious man went to Hamburg, where an association of rich merchants proposed to establish a theatre in which the national drama should be fostered, and offered to Lessing the post of critic and director. The result was the "*Hamburg Dramaturgy*," a critical work of hardly less moment than the "*Laokoon*." But the enterprise was a failure. Lessing's fame had grown, but he had barely bread to eat or clothes to wear. He was wanted in Mannheim, in Berlin, in Vienna, but everywhere his noble pride stood in the way. A little courtier-like fawning would have smoothed his path; but nature had left his knees

unhinged. He stood neglected in his sturdy manhood, hungry and threadbare, while sycophants caught the prizes. It is only natural that sometimes when they meddled with him he turned upon them savagely, — as upon a certain pert young professor, Klotz, whom he extinguished with a polemic energy which ranks among the most impressive exhibitions of Lessing's power.

At length the duke of Brunswick offered him the care of his library at Wolfenbüttel, and was willing to comply with the condition which the threadbare independent demanded, — that what he might choose to write should be submitted to no censorship. The library was extensive, but the situation was remote and unhealthy, and the salary very meagre. His fame was still wider through the publication of his second great play, "*Emilia Galotti*." But Lessing was plunged into dismal surroundings, — without cultivated companionship, poor, sick, the victim rather than the *protégé*, of his master. He was valued only as giving prestige to the little dukedom. The promises made to him, scanty as they were, were never fulfilled ; but the duke's mistresses lived in splendor. His confinement was not unbroken. He went once to Vienna, and it is hard to understand how one could be at the same time so much esteemed and so much neglected. The great and wise of the capital did him honor. Special representations of his plays took place in the court theatre, and Maria Theresa received him with all respect, consulting him deferentially upon various points. They felt that Lessing, with as sharp insight as was ever

granted to mortal, and such bold independence, was dangerous. They admired him, feared him, and let him suffer on. In the train of Prince Leopold of Brunswick he was enabled to visit Italy. The prince was a capable and enthusiastic youth, in whose companionship Lessing must have found much to enjoy. The great writer was received with all honor at Milan, Naples, and Rome. At forty-seven he was married to a woman worthy of him, much beloved, but for whom his poverty forced him to wait years. Even here he was beneath his baleful star. She died early, in child-birth, and a strange bitterness in Lessing's letters tells the agony with which his soul was wrung. From the first, his labors at Wolfenbüttel had been incessant. He discovered in the library valuable manuscripts which had long been lost. By the publication of portions of a work by a radical thinker, Reimarus—the "Wolfenbüttel Fragments"—he called forth the ire of the more rigid Lutherans, with whose champion, the Pastor Götze of Hamburg, he engaged in a controversy, in which he showed the power of a Demosthenes or a Junius. After the death of his wife he lingered three years, broken in body and soul, but with triumphant genius, producing work after work of power as remarkable as had belonged to the earlier works, of tone still loftier. To this time belong the "Education of the Human Race," the "Conversations for Freemasons," and lastly the sublime play of "Nathan the Wise," which is characterized by a loftiness of sentiment for which the world is not yet ready, and has been called, after Göthe's

“Faust,” the most peculiar and characteristic production of German genius. On the fifteenth of February, 1781, at the age of fifty-three, when Göthe was approaching the fulness of his fame, and Schiller had just appeared with “The Robbers,” the day advancing gloriously of which he had been the morning-star, Lessing died.

Lessing was, before everything else, a critic,—taking the term in a high sense, which I shall presently explain. He himself confesses that he was not a true poet: “I do not feel in myself a living spring which wells up through its own force, shooting forth in fresh, pure jets; everything comes from me through pumps and conduits.”¹ With his critical power, however, he had ascertained in poetry the essence, and it is a mark of his greatness that he could compel the working of his talents in fields which nature had made alien to him. To a certain degree only could he compel. His dramas have everything but the poetical breath,—that indescribable peculiarity which streams out in every thought and word of genuine poetry. Lessing’s dramas are less the product of creative fancy than reflecting reason. Still, he was very great. Said Göthe, “Lessing wished to disclaim for himself the title of poet, but his immortal works testify against himself.”

Of his earlier writings, no high place can be assigned to his lyrics. Their philosophy was false,

¹ Hamburgische Dramaturgie.

and their tone sometimes hardly unobjectionable. Lessing himself urged in defence that their philosophy was not his own, but assumed. His somewhat prudish elder sister once threw a parcel of the poems into the flames; in revenge for which Lessing, roughly playful, threw a handful of snow into her bosom, — to cool her excessive zeal, as he said. They are best to be judged as the product of Lessing's time of fermentation, before the noble wine had run fairly clear. While at Wittenberg, Lessing wrote a series of papers called "Vindications,"¹ the aim of which is best described in Lessing's own words: "I can have no more agreeable occupation than to muster the names of famous men, examine their right to immortality, brush away from them undeserved spots, separate from their real greatness the result of their weaknesses, — in short, do everything in a moral way which the superintendent of a picture-gallery does in a physical way." Lessing performed his work with acuteness, courage, and a fine sense of justice. To several great men of the past upon whom had fallen the shadow of an unmerited obloquy, he assigned due honor.

He often appeared to advantage in his fables. One of the best of the collection is entitled "Zeus and the Horse."² "Father of beasts and men," said the horse, approaching the throne of Zeus, "they say I am one of the most beautiful creatures with which you have adorned the world, and my

¹ Rettungen.

² Taken from Sime's Life of Lessing, vol. I, p. 198.

self-love makes me believe it. But is there nothing in me that might be improved?" "And what dost thou think might be improved in thee?" said the kind god, smiling. "Perhaps," said the horse, "I might be more swift if my legs were higher and more slender. A long, swan's neck would not deform me, a broader chest would increase my strength, and I might possess, ready-made, the saddle which the rider places upon me." "Good," replied Zeus. With serious face, he uttered the word of creation, and suddenly there stood before the throne the ugly camel. The horse looked and trembled with amazed horror. "Here," said Zeus, "are higher and more slender legs; here is a long, swan's neck; here is a broader chest; here is the saddle ready-made. Dost thou wish, horse, that I should thus reshape thee?" The horse still trembled. "Go!" continued Zeus; "for this time be taught without being punished. But that thou mayest sometimes be reminded of thy presumption, continue to exist, thou new creature [and Zeus cast a preserving glance at the camel], and may the horse never look at thee without shuddering!"

Through his dramas, Lessing first was recognized as the greatest writer of his time, and in this direction "*Minna von Barnhelm*" first became famous. A critic of our own time, of high repute, speaks of "*Minna von Barnhelm*" as still the best German comedy.¹ Lessing gathered the materials for it during his life as government secretary at

¹ Julian Schmidt.

Breslau, immediately after which, as has been narrated, it was published. It exercised an immense influence immediately upon its appearance, at once in Berlin making German plays fashionable and popular, whereas before only French plays had been considered tolerable. The time is just at the close of the Seven Years' War. Prussia and Saxony, neighbor states, have been hostile to one another. Tellheim, a major of the Prussian army, has advanced to the magistrates of the Saxon district from which he is to exact a contribution the sum required, finding that they could not pay from their own means without prostrating the territory. The magnanimous deed makes such an impression on Minna von Barnhelm, a wealthy and high-born Saxon lady, that she seeks his acquaintance, desiring to become his wife. Tellheim recognizes her worth, and they are betrothed. The war ends, and the honorable Tellheim presently becomes an object of suspicion. He is accused of having been bribed by the Saxon magistrates whom he has obliged, and during the investigation falls into sad circumstances. At this time the piece begins. Tellheim is living at an inn, the host of which wishes to become rid of him as a moneyless encumbrance. In despair, Tellheim is forced to pawn his engagement ring, which is recognized by Minna von Barnhelm, who has just arrived at the inn at this juncture, searching for her lover. The lovers meet, but Tellheim holds it incompatible with his honor to continue his relations with her. He is cast off and suspected, crippled by wounds, a beg-

gar, and must not think of a union with the rich and honored gentlewoman. Since no representations avail to change his conclusion, Minna hits upon a stratagem, in which, it must be confessed, there is some sacrifice of truth. She represents to Tellheim that her love for him has caused her to be disinherited. She had known the high-hearted man well. Just as decided as he was to resign her when he thought her rich is he now that she shall trust herself to his protection. As his own misfortune struck him down, made him negligent and dispirited, her misfortune restores his manfulness. He looks freely about, and feels strong and willing to undertake everything for her. Meantime the major receives a letter from the king, in which his innocence is recognized, and he is summoned to take service again. Now Minna pretends that she, on her side, must break off the relation, and cites all the reasons which he had before employed, even returning the engagement ring. Tellheim falls into despair again; but meantime appears Minna's uncle. Tellheim, who considers him her persecuter, thinks now only of protecting her; Minna, however, drops her ruse, and the uncle, upon his entrance, finds two happy people.

So meagre a sketch has little value in giving one an impression of a play. It was a vivid artistic presentment of contemporary life, a field now for the first time occupied by the German drama. It is evident that the plot of the play gives opportunities for both pathos and humor; these are well improved, and certain subordinate characters — the villainous

host, a ridiculous Frenchman, an honest old sergeant, and Minna's lively waiting-maid—stand in an effective contrast with their principals. Lessing wrote the piece with high aims. He wished to rebuke the disposition to ape the French; to rebuke the ruling powers for their indifference to the soldiers who had won the victories of the "Seven Years' War;" in particular, to extinguish the provincial hate which had taken deep root during the hostilities in Prussia and Saxony. By the union of the Prussian Tellheim and the Saxon Minna he showed that the dislike was unnatural, and due only to sad political conditions, the national character being everywhere the same. The lessons were noble, and most effectively given.

Still grander was the teaching in Lessing's later dramas. Besides *Minna von Barnhelm*, there are two which count as masterpieces: "*Emilia Galotti*" and "*Nathan the Wise*;" the others we need not notice. With regard to the "*Emilia Galotti*," we must pass it with a momentary glance, although it has been said to be still, artistically considered, the best German tragedy.¹ Its plot is somewhat repulsive, resembling in some of its features the old Roman story of *Virginia*. Its design was to hold up to execration the baseness of the German princes, with which the land was full. The names and scenes were, indeed, Italian; it was a thin veil, however, which the world at once penetrated; corruption in high places heard and trembled at the bold, denounc-

¹ Julian Schmidt.

ing voice. The glorious "Nathan the Wise" we can best consider in connection with certain other works which are near it in spirit and date of composition,—the closing years of Lessing's life. At present we must consider him in another field.

Madame de Stäel has remarked¹ that perhaps it is in Germany alone that literature has derived its origin from criticism; everywhere else criticism has followed the great productions of art, but in Germany it produced them. To a large extent the remark is true, and the critic whose words proved to be such Promethean fire was Lessing. If we would describe Lessing in one word, that word would be "critic;" but we must understand the term in an elevated sense. He was sent into the world to judge, and we see him standing, in his century, parting, unerringly, the gold from the dross in various domains,—in literature and art, in politics, morals, and religion. No man of Teutonic race has possessed such a touchstone; it is claimed that no mortal has ever surpassed him.² While his search for truth was constant, his battle with hypocrisy and lies was just as eager and constant; nor did he know the sensation of fear. I find the expression applied to him, that he was logic become flesh.³ In the language which he employed we may recognize the clearness and charm of his spirit. Every expression is perspicuous, definite, and choice. With many German writers we must first vanquish the

¹ L. Allemagne.

² Gervinus.

³ Kurz.

presentation, in order to press to the thought which it mistily wraps. In Lessing, finely says a writer, the presentation is so clear, the thought at the first view springs so powerfully forth, it almost appears to have passed immediately out of the spirit of the thinker into ours, without being clothed at first in an exterior garment. His critical work consisted at first of judgments of particular men and books; afterwards he treated comprehensive subjects in connected writings. He was a youth of twenty-two when he began. From the first independent, although inclined to the views of the Swiss school, he did not submit entirely to its authority. From the first there was love of truth, acuteness, refined taste. At length, with the "Laokoon," he enters upon his second and greater period.

To a shallow student the merits of the "Laokoon" are not apparent, but it is perhaps right to say that it appears a work of power in proportion to one's intellectual insight. The greatest minds are those which have been most impressed by it. Macaulay said of it, that it filled him with wonder and despair, so far did it seem beyond his own power of accomplishment; and Macaulay put no low estimate upon what he could do. Herder, in an afternoon and the night following, read it through with the greatest eagerness three times; and although, in an elaborate criticism, he afterwards took exception to many of its positions, he paid a high tribute to its value. The whole literary career of Göthe was affected by it, and in his old age the poet glowingly acknowledged his obligation, in a passage to be hereafter quoted.

The work treats of the boundary between poetry and the "formative arts,"¹—a name by which Lessing designates painting and sculpture,—the arts which make presentations to the eye by means of sensible forms. It was the fruit of long years of labor and investigation, ripening slowly in Lessing's mind while he was government secretary at Breslau. Unfortunately, like several other of Lessing's finest works, it was never completed. It was important to the development of poetry in this way: that it drove completely out of view the notions which until then had been in vogue, substituting new ones, whose truth was immediately recognized, and which soon showed themselves fruitful and successful.

The Swiss Breiting² had claimed that poetry and painting were not separated in their essence; that, as Simonides, the Greek poet, had already said, poetry was a speaking painting; painting, a dumb poetry. By this principle the German poetry of that time was completely mastered. Lessing showed, on the other hand, in keen and close development, that poetry and the formative arts are different, as well in respect to the objects they should strive after as in respect to the effects they are adapted to produce. In Lessing's day lived a critic of art of the highest authority, for whom Lessing himself had the profoundest respect, and whom the world still holds in high esteem,—Winckelmann. After hard struggles, the force of Winckelmann's genius at length became apparent; from Germany he had

¹ Bildende Künste.

² Kurz.

gone to Rome, to a position in which he had the fairest opportunities for the study of antique art, and was now at the summit of his fame. A remark contained in a treatise by Winckelmann suggested the "Laokoon." The remark was that the universal and salient distinction of Greek masterpieces in painting and sculpture was a certain noble simplicity and quiet greatness, as well in the pose of the figures as also in their expression. By way of example, he cites the famous group of "Laokoon" and his two sons attacked by serpents. The poet Virgil represents "Laokoon" as crying; the unknown sculptor of the group, on the other hand, in a more dignified way, with lips just parted, and with no distortion of the features, as if uttering a groan; the poet therefore, claims Winckelmann, stands far behind the sculptor.

At the outset of his treatise Lessing steps forth in defence of the poet. The highest law of sculpture and painting, he claims, is beauty; the object of these—the formative arts—is to satisfy the eye, which nothing but the beautiful can delight. In vain does the formative artist envy the poet the faculty of seizing and characterizing all objects, and of overstepping the limits of the beautiful. The poet labors, not for the eye, the seeing faculty, but for something broader,—the imagination. The sculptor did not represent "Laokoon" as crying, with wide-open mouth, because crying distorts the face in a repulsive way, and so offends beauty. Virgil, however, needed not to pay this heed, because he, as poet, was not forced to create a form which the eyes

should perceive, and which must remain fixed in the one situation chosen. The sculptor of the "Laokoon" no doubt had in mind in his presentation the description of Virgil. "Whence does it come," says Lessing, "that the artist and poet have comprehended and treated the subject in ways so different?" The critic goes on to show—and here appears his great acuteness—that the reason lies in the essential difference between the two arts. Formative art—painting and sculpture—represents its object in space; poetry represents its object in time; formative art by means of shape and color; poetry by articulate tones; bodies, with their visible qualities, the particular objects of the first; actions, of the second. To be sure, formative art can represent actions, but only through hints in shapes; and just so can poetry represent shapes, but only through hints in actions. In numerous examples Lessing shows how impossible it is for the poet to represent bodily shapes in all their particulars, showing how even great poets have failed. Homer, for whom Lessing had a veneration almost superstitious, never errs by attempting such representations. In the *Iliad*, events are fully narrated, but no long descriptions are given of objects. A ship is simply the "black ship," the "hollow," or the "well-rowed, black ship." Of the stationary object, Homer says no more; but when he speaks of an action, or a series of actions, connected with a ship,—such as rowing, embarking, or landing,—he tells the story fully. Nevertheless, the representation of bodily objects does not lie entirely without the domain of

poetry. How it may be done, we see from watching Homer's method. When the poet would give us a notion of Agamemnon's dress, he makes the king clothe himself, putting on one garment after another, and, at last, grasping the sceptre; so reducing, as it were, the description of the magnificent object—the king in his splendor—to a description of events.¹ Again, in considering the shield of Achilles, Vulcan is represented as busy with its fabrication; one by one before our eyes, as he labors, appear the figures with which the shield is embossed.² “He wishes to paint the bow of Pandarus,—a bow of horn, of such and such length, well polished, and at both ends tipped with gold. What does he do? Does he enumerate all these properties, one after the other, thus dryly? By no means; that would be to sketch such a bow, to write down its qualities, but not to paint it. He begins with the hunt of the wild goat³ from whose horns the bow was made. Pandarus had waylaid it among the rocks and slain it; the horns were of extraordinary size, therefore he destined them for a bow; they come to the workshop; the artist joins them, polishes them, tips them. And so, with the poet, we see gradually advance towards completion that which the painter could not treat except as completed.”⁴

Such is the limitation of poetry. It has power in-

¹ *Iliad*, x.

² *Iliad*, xviii.

³ *Iliad*, iv.

⁴ From the *Laokoon*; translated in Sime's *Life of Lessing*.

ferior to the formative arts in respect to the imitation of beauty,—that which speaks to the eye ; on the other hand, its sphere is much broader than that of the formative arts, the whole immeasurable realm of nature standing open to its imitation. It can represent the hateful, even the terrible and repulsive. All this is beyond formative art, which Lessing urges is bound by its highest law, — that of beauty. It can show but one attitude, one expression, and what sculptor or painter would wish to select for that one phase what causes pain and disgust? The poet, on the other hand, by passages of splendor, can redeem a spot of darkness ; indeed, by contrast with darkness, heighten the splendor. The two arts are sisters, then, but must always be clearly distinguished. Poetry must narrate events ; painting and sculpture represent coexistent objects.

In point of style, the “*Laokoon*” is excellent. It is refreshing enough, after a struggle with the lumbering, involved sentences in which so many of the German thinkers have put their ideas, to turn to the brief, clear periods in which Lessing “economizes the attention”¹ of his readers. An immense range of learning in languages ancient and modern is indicated by the innumerable citations and references. Lessing’s knowledge of literature was much wider than of art. In the latter direction his opportunities for accomplishment, up to the time of the composition of the “*Laokoon*,” had been slight ; it follows naturally that the influence of the book

¹ Herbert Spencer.

upon literature has been more marked and valuable than in the other sphere. Is it right to say that beauty should be the sole object of the formative artist? Lessing himself is forced to admit that even his perfect Greeks sometimes represented the repulsive,—as when they delineated the countenances of the Furies,—but saves himself by saying that such representations are not art, but religion. “Only when an artist is free to follow the impulses of his own mind is he truly an artist.” What shall be said of the historical artist who, when putting on the canvas, or in marble, scenes and personages of the past, certainly makes beauty a secondary object, if he regards it at all? What shall be said of *genre* pictures, and those which have a humorous purpose, in which there is the same postponement of this first essential? If they are to be excluded from works of art, how we are limiting our understanding of the term! We should abbreviate the list of the world’s masterpieces by taking away some of what have been held the finest examples. Take the “Laokoon” itself, from which Lessing’s discussion proceeds,—what can be our understanding of beauty when, in the tortured Trojan priest, we call the furrowed brow, the groaning lips, the writhing limbs, beautiful? The critics of Lessing object, and with reason, to his theory in this point.

Lessing is undoubtedly much nearer the truth in his consideration of the function of poetry: that since articulated tones are its means, and its object must be represented in time, not shapes, but actions—that which is successive—are its proper

concern. The development of the thought here is the most interesting and satisfactory part of the "Laokoon." The keen analysis seems to have penetrated to one of the great secrets of Homer's power; examples as instructive too could have been selected from Shakespeare. That long descriptions of stationary objects can hardly be otherwise than oppressive is made clear in the development and the citations. But even here we should deprive ourselves of some of the precious things in poetry if we should cut off all such passages.

I turned,

And ere a star can wink, beheld her there;
 For up the porch there grew an Eastern rose,
 That, flowering high, the last night's gale had caught,
 And blown across the walk. One arm aloft —
 Gowned in pure white, that fitted to the shape —
 Holding the bush, to fix it back, she stood.
 A single stream of all her soft brown hair
 Poured on one side; the shadow of the flowers
 Stole all the golden gloss, and, wavering
 Lovingly lower, trembled on her waist, —
 Ah, happy shade! and still went wavering down;
 But ere it touched a foot that might have danced
 The greensward into greener circles, dipt,
 And mixed with shadows of the common ground!
 But the full day dwelt on her brows, and sunned
 Her violet eyes, and all her Hebe-bloom,
 And doubled his own warmth against her lips,
 And on the bounteous wave of such a breast
 As never pencil drew. Half light, half shade,
 She stood, a sight to make an old man young.¹

If Lessing had belonged to our generation, can we imagine him knitting his brow severely, and pro-

¹ Tennyson: The Gardener's Daughter.

nouncing the poet's work here a mere perversion, that he had stepped beyond his sphere to undertake a task which only the painter or sculptor could discharge? It is hard to believe; yet with some abatement from the absoluteness of the statement, Lessing's theory will stand. Only the most consummate skill can succeed here. It is a usurpation of the functions of the formative artist for the poet to consider the stationary object; usurpations, however, are sometimes justifiable in art as well as politics, and in the domain of the arts great genius may authorize them. Lessing is right, nevertheless, in saying that the safer and better way—the natural way—is to reduce the description of the object to an action; the theory commends itself when stated, and when illustrated by the splendid Homeric examples,—the pomp of Agamemnon, the bow of Pandarus, the shield of Achilles.—we are convinced at once.

The “Laokoon” is so fragmentary that many of its thoughts are barely hinted. For instance, ways in which different arts may be united in their operation are considered. The connection of poetry and music is a natural one; in the ordinary opera, says Lessing, music is principal, poetry is auxiliary; a connection can be conceived—most fruitful in noble result—in which poetry shall be the principal, and music the auxiliary. In the few words in which the suggestion is thrown out¹ it is thought that Lessing anticipates one of the most remarkable

¹ Sime.

and characteristic æsthetic developments of the present century,—the movement associated with the name of Richard Wagner.

Every thoughtful student of the “Laokoon” will find himself again and again questioning its positions. No writer considers it without making objections; Lessing himself often seems abundantly conscious that he lays himself open to attack. It is, however, everywhere fertile in suggestions,—a wonderful monument of learning, acuteness, and lucid statement. Its influence is plain upon all the subsequent literature of Germany, and no writer felt so deeply his obligation to Lessing as the one who towers as the greatest,—Göthe. At the time of the publication of the “Laokoon,” 1766, Göthe was a youth of seventeen, a student at Leipsic. In his old age, recalling the impression made upon him by the book,¹ “One must be a youth,” he said, “to realize the effect exercised upon us by Lessing’s “Laokoon,” which transported us from the region of miserable observation into the free fields of thought. The so long misunderstood ‘*ut pictura poesis*’ of Simonides was at once set aside; the difference between art and poetry made clear; the peaks of both appeared separated, however near each other might be their bases. The former had to confine itself within the limits of the beautiful, while to poetry—which cannot ignore the meaning of any kind of facts—it was given to pass into wider fields. The former labors for external sense, which is satisfied

¹ Wahrheit und Dichtung, page 2, book 7, Sime’s translation.

only by means of the beautiful; the latter for the imagination, which may occupy itself even with the ugly. As by a flash of lightning, all the consequences of this splendid thought were revealed to us; all previous criticism was thrown away, like a worn-out coat."

In many points in the "Laokoon" the truth was not reached, but every line shows plainly how eager was the impulse which drove the writer toward truth, and there are few books in the world that have stimulated others more powerfully in the effort to gain truth. Such a result is precisely what Lessing would have considered the highest success. "Not the truth," said he,—in what is perhaps the most famous of his sayings,—“of which a man believes himself to be possessed, but the sincere effort he has made to gain truth, makes the worth of a man.”¹

Still further limitations of poetry are to be found in other writings of Lessing. In the treatise called "Pope as a Metaphysician," Lessing maintains that philosophical systems are no material for a poet. In fact, that a didactic poem is a monstrosity. In the treatises upon the "Fables of Æsop" again the same idea appears, the unsparing critic showing that, as it is not the function of poetry to teach philosophy, so it is no part of its function to teach morals. Let the philosophy and the morals be taught indeed, but by the sage and the saint, while the poet performs, as his sole function, only

¹ Wolfenbüttel Fragments.

the task of giving to the spirit of man a noble pleasure. This limitation of Lessing was in opposition to the schools both of Leipsic and Zürich, but it became universally recognized, and has left important traces on subsequent literary history. With Lessing's work as a critic of literature must be put what is known as the "Hamburg Dramaturgy." From the sketch given of his life it is apparent that, even in his youth, the drama had for him the strongest attraction. He regarded it from the highest point of view, as an instrument of the utmost power in the promotion of human virtue and culture. He could not imagine a good dramatic author who should not possess nobility of character. At the conclusion of his Breslau life, a company of rich merchants in Hamburg had associated themselves together to establish a national theatre of a high character. In the city was a superior troop of actors, among whom were some who realized even Lessing's lofty ideal, both as artists and men. The post of dramatist and adviser in the new enterprise was offered to Lessing. He declined to write plays, but consented to take part in the undertaking as critic and counsellor. It was as if, in an American city, a body of well-meaning men of wealth should institute a theatrical enterprise to produce plays of the highest class, in the finest manner, establishing as critic and director James Russell Lowell or George William Curtis.

Lessing began his work with enthusiasm. There was then almost no German drama; Göthe was a boy of seventeen; Schiller only seven; Lessing's

own "Minna von Barnhelm" had just appeared,—the only German comedy. The greatness of Shakespeare was just becoming known, through the efforts of Lessing himself, to the best among the Germans; but there were no proper translations, and by the nation at large he was either unknown or regarded as the uncouth savage described by Voltaire. Lessing was to publish a bi-weekly sheet, which was to be a critical register of all the pieces produced, and to accompany every step of poet and actor. The enterprise soon proved unsuccessful, and Lessing's connection with it brought him much unhappiness, but Germany gained something of the greatest value. In his criticisms upon the plays he broke the path for the German drama. Except his own Minna, there was little to be represented but the pieces of French authors. Lessing thought it necessary to destroy the prestige of the French theatre, because the founding of a German drama was impossible as long as this influence ruled the stage. It was by no means a negative strife which he waged. He developed his own views upon the drama, which were mainly founded upon the "Poetics" of Aristotle, and the thorough study of the Greek masterpieces, as well as upon Shakespeare. He spoke severely of the French, and often went too far, but does justice to the masterpieces. The "Hamburg Dramaturgy" is more fragmentary and imperfect in its arrangement than the "Laokoon." The hopes with which it was undertaken ended in disappointment, and Lessing, from the first, had in view detached considerations rather

than a connected work. But of the service which it has rendered the greatest minds testify. The performance of one play affords him opportunity to dwell upon the terrible and pathetic upon the stage. In connection with another he discusses historical tragedy. In another he lays down the limitations of comedy. In every contribution appears his marvellous power.

There is not space to consider farther Lessing's work as a literary critic. Had it not been performed, the subsequent German development in art and literature could not have taken place; Göthe and Schiller would have been impossible. But we have not yet seen Lessing at his greatest. He was a critic in a higher than the ordinary sense — a judge, and of the loftiest kind. What he did for art and literature appears almost trifling before what he might have done — what he longed to do — in departments yet nearer human interests. He accomplished much, but he was bound in on every side, and the mighty striver went to his grave thwarted to the end by his untoward circumstances. As his manhood went forward he appeared by turns in the fields of politics, philosophy, and religion, bringing everywhere his marvellous touchstone.

Of his ideas of government, let me begin my consideration with this declaration of his, which perhaps will seem startling: "According to my way of thinking, the reputation of a zealous patriot is the very last that I would covet; that is, of patriotism which teaches me to forget that I am a citizen of the world." It is startling; but if we develop the say-

ing, it will be found full of grandeur. Germany, in his day, was broken up into divisions, ruled for the most part by despots who despised the people they enslaved, their language, their manners, their literature. Lessing was speaking to the poet Gleim, a man whose fame had been mainly gained by celebrating the victories of Frederick in the Seven Years' War, and with whom patriotism meant a limitation of the sympathies within the boundaries of what was then Prussia. Lessing's heart demanded something far broader. In the Germany of our time—wherein the divisions are abrogated, and a government prevails in some degree respectful to its subjects, wise, and humane—he would have found more to love. Yet even this, we may be sure from his declarations, could not have given scope to his soul. He loved to call himself a cosmopolite,—citizen of the world,—and any patriotism which interfered with the broadest and noblest humanity, love for the entire race, he felt to be vicious. He hated what he calls “the fatal thing denominated war,” and sought to forget the fearful misery he beheld about him, which he was powerless to relieve, by burying himself in his studies. To speak, write, or act in any way for the rights of the people seemed, in Lessing's day, almost madness. The time was not ripe, or receptive even, for such a reformatory influence as he might under other circumstances have exerted. He was far in advance of his age.

The grandeur of his thoughts in this direction is perhaps most apparent in a series of dialogues, whose title hardly gives a clue to the lofty nature of

the contents,—“Conversations for Freemasons.” At the end of the last century there was in Europe a great love for secret societies; there was no outlet for the energies of men in public life, and they were in a manner forced into clandestine action; Freemasonry, in particular, was popular. In his youth Lessing had satirized it; in his manhood, however, he became a Freemason. He considered Freemasonry, as it was, to be very trivial, but conceived that it admitted of a grand development. In the “Conversations for Freemasons” the high idea is expressed that, if each individual knew how to rule himself, government might be dispensed with. Really, it is an evil,—in an imperfect world a necessary one; but in proportion as we approach the ideal state it may be dropped. “Observe,” says one of the interlocutors, “the ants and bees,—what activity and what order! Order can exist without government, if each individual can govern himself. The highest point humanity can reach is that of a society of developed men who stand in no need of laws, because they have absolute self-control.” Lessing doubts whether this ideal condition can ever become real. Certainly, government is now necessary, but the thinker combats those who overrate its importance. In Greece the individual was sacrificed to the state; no welfare of the state, however, can be separate from that of the individuals who compose it. The evils connected with the existence of states are shown. First, the world is divided into nations, and the patriotism fostered which is a mere expansion of selfishness, instead of a spirit of

love to all mankind. Second, difference of states has much to do with differences of religion. Third, the existence of states implies also a stratification of society. "How few evils there are in the world," he exclaims, "which have not their ground in this difference of ranks!" As is said, however, Lessing regarded the existence of states as a necessity, feeling that the amelioration for which he so earnestly hoped could come only gradually. "We must accept the world as it is, and await quietly the rising of the sun, allowing such lights as there are to burn as long as they will and can. To extinguish the lights, and after they are extinguished to perceive that the stumps must be relighted, or other lights brought in, is folly." He expressly disclaimed all effort toward violence or revolution. "What costs blood," he said, "is certainly not worth blood." No single form of political constitution seemed to him absolutely the best. In some stages of culture an enlightened despot is most fit; in others, a republic; in others, a constitutional monarchy. But the upholders of all should be ready to make modifications, bringing the world gradually nearer to the point where every form of government can be dispensed with. In all forms of government arise things highly injurious to human happiness. It is the necessary smoke which we must take with the fire. To render the evils as harmless as possible, Lessing dreamed of a brotherhood of exalted minds. The wisest and best men in each state were to labor, not for the impossible absolute abolition, but for the possible alleviation of oppressive and injurious ele-

ments. Men above the prejudices of nationality, and who know where patriotism ceases to be a virtue, were to strive to do away with provincial prejudices; men not in thralldom to a hereditary religion, who do not believe their own creed to be the only vehicle of truth, were to mitigate the prejudices of religious intolerance; men too high to be dazzled by social distinctions were to aim at equalizing the differences of rank, and making them less oppressive. The energies of such men were not to be dissipated in isolation, but Lessing desired a fraternization of wise and good spirits of all nations, for the accomplishment of these beneficent ends. In his thought, Freemasonry might become such a bond.¹

These are the ideas of an elevated spirit, and we may hope that the world will see, some day, a confederation of the purest, wisest spirits of all lands, held together according to the scheme of the high-hearted German,—to raise the low, mitigate prejudice, and bind the nations for love and peace. Lessing's contemporaries sneered at it as the scheme of a visionary, or detected in it the breath of sedition. It is melancholy to read that the promulgation of his great thought only brought upon him persecution, and that he was harshly forbidden to complete the work in which the idea was contained.

Lessing's political philosophy cannot be farther discussed, nor can I do more than glance at his work

¹ Kurz.

as a speculative thinker. In this direction, what he has left is more broken and unsatisfactory than in any other. His influence was important in restoring to a place of due honor the name of Spinoza, whom he held in great reverence. The following words, which I find applied to him, are perhaps not excessive: "The harbinger of modern philosophy, and in this province an awakener and emancipator of the Germans."

But even yet we have not touched upon Lessing's grandest utterances, — those upon spiritual progress and religious tolerance. There are many in the Christian world to-day, as there were in Lessing's time, who will think he went quite too far in his bold thinking. There are others who find in these writings declarations worthy of a prophet. Whether we like or dislike, the sincerity, the bravery, the benevolence which he everywhere showed may certainly be admired by all. Luther believed in the presence of the literal body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. He would have shown no horror at the burning of a witch; indeed, he found fault with magistrates for persecuting them with too little energy. Yet we can admire him. Let those who reject the opinions of Lessing treat him with similar candor, — while regretting his mistakes, do honor to his manhood. In the department of theological controversy there has been seldom a more violent tempest than that excited by the publication of the "Wolfenbüttel Fragments." A manuscript volume, written by a free-thinking scholar, Reimarus, had fallen into Lessing's hands while at

Hamburg. During his life at Wolfenbüttel he published extracts from this manuscript, accompanied by annotations. He carefully abstained from defending the positions of Reimarus, which were extremely radical. Many of the ideas Lessing expressly states that he does not accept, and in his notes makes an attempt to soften their baldness. He claims that his desire in giving to the world the extracts is to stimulate enquiry, and he contends for absolute freedom of discussion. The excitement which the publication caused in the religious world was immense. That Lessing had dared to make known such infidelity was condemned, and he was accused of drawing upon the stores under his guardianship only to disseminate poison. In spite of his disclaimers, it was plain that the bold ideas of Reimarus found some sympathy in the mind of Lessing, and denunciations became violent. And now began the most memorable controversy in which Lessing was ever engaged. The champion of the orthodox party, in the storm which the "Wolfenbüttel Fragments," had caused, was Götze, a pastor of Hamburg, a man of scholarship and power, with whom Lessing had been well acquainted, but who now showed unreasonable violence. On Lessing's side the controversy was undertaken when he was utterly crushed by the death of his wife. He sought relief in the strife from the melancholy into which he was plunged. It cannot perhaps be said that his vehemence went too far, but never since the time of Luther had such a fierce polemic energy been displayed; the papers of Lessing can be

matched only among the finest masterpieces of denunciatory eloquence.

Lessing's controversy with Götze forced him into a plainness of speech upon religious subjects from which he would have shrunk in his earlier years. Among his latest writings appeared the "Education of the Human Race," whose tone was of the boldest. Lessing declares in this that the Old Testament contains a revelation from God, but, at the same time, that it is not necessary to think that revelations must set forth absolute truth. We must rather consider them as adapted to the particular stages of progress at which they are given. Through revelation man obtains nothing which he could not gain from his own reason. In giving a revelation to a chosen people, God did not tell them all. The Old Testament is only suited for rude minds; a better teacher must come to supplement the instruction; and so, in the fulness of time, appeared Christ. Like other faiths, Christianity, although for a certain stage all-sufficient, is destined to be superseded, though Lessing here counsels the extremest caution. "Refrain, thou who dost stamp and rage at the last page of this elementary book, from letting thy weaker fellow-pupils perceive what thou dost suspect, or hast begun to see. Until they have overtaken thee, — these weaker fellow-pupils, — turn rather once more to this elementary book, and examine whether that which thou deemest only turns 'of method, makeshifts of dialectic, is not something better.'¹" Lessing was strongly opposed

¹ Sime's Translation.

to those who, in his time, represented Christianity as the invention of priests, and harmful. Not only Christianity, but all positive religions, he taught, are, or have been, beneficial in their time. "Why shall we not rather recognize in positive religions the direction in which the human understanding has alone been able to develop itself in various places than either smile or scowl at any of them."¹

The reader is so accustomed to the mention of the incompleteness of Lessing's work, it almost goes without saying that the "Education of the Human Race" is but a fragment. Thrown off, as it was, during the decay of his powers, close upon the end of his life, no work of his is perhaps more imperfect, — scarcely more than a jotting down of hints upon the greatest of topics. The number is not small, however, of those who attach a greater value to it than to anything the thinker has left. Though much that it contains will be repugnant to multitudes, there are now and then glimpses of great thoughts which must powerfully impress all. For instance, what can be finer than Lessing's law of progress? Men obey the moral law, he says, first, to avoid unpleasant consequences in this world; second, in the world to come; and, third, they choose virtue for its own sake. In the first and second instances, selfishness is at the root of action; in the first instance, at its coarsest. In the third, men are drawn by pure love, and we reach the time of the "new eternal gospel."

The masterpiece of Lessing is the peerless play

¹ Sime's Translation.

of "Nathan the Wise." It was written late in life, when his philosophy had ripened, and when his spirit, sorely tried in every way, had gained from the sad experience only sweeter humanity. Judged by rules of art, it is easy to find fault with it. The story is involved, the speeches of the characters often too long, the action not always natural; it is what Lessing himself condemned,—a didactic poem. The moral elevation of the piece, however, is so noble, one is impatient at any attempt to measure it by such a trivial standard. Let it violate rules of art as it may, it is thrilled from first to last by a glowing, God-sent fire, such as has appeared rarely in the literature of the world. It teaches love to God and man, tolerance, the beauty of peace. Nathan, a Jew, who has suffered at the hands of the crusaders the extremest affliction, the loss of his wife and seven children, is not embittered by the experience. He adopts a Christian child, Recha, and christens her as his own. She grows to womanhood, and at length, during Nathan's absence, nearly loses her life in the burning of the house. She is saved from the danger by a young Templar. The consequence of the rescue is mutual love and a betrothal. Meantime the Sultan Saladin, pressed for money, sends for Nathan. The Mahometan, not less than the Jew, is noble. Nathan tells the sultan the famous story of the rings, and the two are drawn together in friendship. At length it appears that the Templar and Recha are really brother and sister,—children of a crusader who has been a friend of Nathan. A still stranger revelation comes

to pass. When once the young Templar had fallen into the power of Saladin, the sultan spared his life because he resembled a brother, lost many years before. It comes to light that the father of the Templar and Recha is no other than the lost brother of the sultan, who, forsaking his faith, became a Christian, married a Christian wife, and at length lost his life fighting for the cross. It is perhaps the greatest artistic blemish of the plot that the lovers prove at last to be in this way brother and sister, into which relation they subside with an equanimity quite exasperating to the critics. Recha clings with true filial love to Nathan; Saladin extends warm affection to the children of his brother. The three leading figures, — Nathan, Saladin, and the Templar, — stand bound together in a close intimacy. They are all examples of nobleness, though individualized. In Nathan, severe chastening has brought to pass the finest gentleness and love; Saladin is the perfect type of chivalry, though impetuous and over-lavish through the possession of great power; the Templar is full of the vehemence of youth. So they stand, side by side, impressive patterns of manhood, yet representatives of creeds most deeply hostile. Thus, in concrete presentment, Lessing teaches impressively what he had often elsewhere inculcated in a less vivid way, one of the grandest of lessons, — that nobleness is bound to no confession of faith; that it is false to declare this or that religion the one alone worthy, stigmatizing the confessors of other faiths as accursed of God.

In days of yore, says the famous story of the

ring, the parable in which the lesson of the play is contained, there lived an Oriental who possessed a priceless ring, which had power to make its owner beloved by God and by mankind. He bequeathed it to his best-loved son, and so arranged that it should go down evermore, falling in each generation to the favorite. At length in the transmission it fell to a father who had three sons, all equally dear to his heart. To each son in turn he promises the ring, as each, for the time being, seems dearest to him. In perplexity, at last he has two other rings made, such counterparts of the true one that when they are placed side by side he himself cannot distinguish it. To each son then he gives a ring, and dies. Disputes break out among the children, each claiming to be the possessor of the true ring. The wise judge to whom the question is submitted finds it impossible to decide. "Let each one of you," he says, "deem his own true, and make it true by trying who can display most gentleness, forbearance, charity, united to heartfelt resignation to God's will. If, after a thousand thousand years, the virtues of the ring continue to show themselves in your children's children, perhaps one wiser than I will sit on this judgment-seat, who can decide." No ring, Lessing would say, gives one the power to dominate over the rest; so of religions, — no one is the exclusive religion of the world. It was his thought, as has been seen, that every historic religion is in some sense divine, — a necessary evolution from the conditions under which it originates. Let each, then, allow his neighbors to live in their

own way, convinced that theirs is as good for them as his for him. What a man believes is a matter of utter indifference if his life is not good. "If it is said," wrote Lessing, after completing it, "that this piece teaches that among all sorts of people there have long been men who have disregarded all revealed religions, and have yet been good men; if it is added that my intention has evidently been to represent such men in a less repulsive light than that in which the Christian mob has usually looked upon them, I should not have much to urge against that view."

There are many in the world to-day—as there were in Lessing's own time—to whom he will seem to have gone far astray. Few indeed are those whom he will carry with him in all his teaching. He himself in fact seems often conscious of inconsistency, and prepared to modify his views; this in all the departments which he touched,—literature, art, politics, philosophy, religion. A searcher after truth, not a teacher of truth, is the character he claimed for himself; and in all that he wrote his effort was, not to impress upon men certain views, but to incite them to seek for truth themselves. "Not the truth," he says in the passage which has been already partly quoted, "not the truth in whose possession a man is, or believes himself to be, but the earnest efforts which he has made to attain truth, make the worth of the man. For it is not through the possession, but through the search for truth, that his powers are strengthened, in which alone his ever-growing perfection

exists. Possession makes him calm, indolent, proud. If God held all truth in His right hand, and in His left the ever-living desire for truth ; if He said to me, Choose, I should, even though with the condition that I should remain forever in error, humbly incline towards His left, and say, Father, give ; pure truth is for Thee alone.”¹

“ His form was compact and vigorous, of more than ordinary size, and had a symmetry developed by physical exercise of every kind to the freedom of noble, natural deportment. The head was elegantly poised upon a powerful neck ; the face was well-defined, of a naturally healthy complexion, illumined by the intellectual brilliancy of large, dark-blue eyes, whose glance, not too piercing, was yet resolute and ingenuous. The thick, long hair, of a beautiful light-brown, even in his latest years was sprinkled with only a few silver threads. He was always careful in deportment, nothing in his outward mien betraying the sedentary scholar. His clothing was always neat, his manners noble, his voice rich, vibrating between baritone and tenor.”²

His life is a profoundly sad one ; a constant struggle with poverty and misappreciation ; a succession of disappointments ; suspected in his father’s house, suspected and persecuted throughout his career, the happiness finally granted him in his union with the woman he loved closing within one

¹ The Wolfenbüttel Fragments, quoted in Zimmern’s *Life of Lessing*.

² Stahr’s *Life of Lessing*.

short year in the bitterest sorrow. The end came in 1781, when he was but fifty-two. "On the fifteenth of February he rose in the afternoon, and caused himself to be dressed. It seemed as though he wished, like the Roman emperor, to die standing. Towards evening, when it was announced that friends were in the ante-room, desiring to see him, the door opened and Lessing entered, a most sad and heart-rending object to look upon! The noble countenance, damp with the dews of death, shone as in a celestial transfiguration. Silent, and with an unspeakably affectionate look, he pressed the hand of his weeping daughter, and uncovering his head, bowed kindly to the others present. But the feet refused their office; he is borne to a couch, and immediately afterwards, at nine o'clock in the evening, an apoplectic fit terminated his life."¹

It is easy to make the pilgrimage to the spots made sacred by the memory of Lessing. His life passed, almost without break, in a little group of towns which lie within a short ride of each other. Wittenberg has a greater association than with his name even; yet he was worthy to walk there, even in the footsteps of Luther, in his vigorous young manhood, when he was enthusiastic to rescue from obloquy the fame of great men of the past, unworthily condemned.² It lends a new interest to Leipsic that he lived there in his unconstrained, Bohemian days. Brunswick, which grudgingly of-

¹ Stahr.

² Die Rettungen.

ferred him an asylum, does him honor in a bronze statue which is the finest ornament of the city; and Wolfenbüttel, which almost smothered him with its dreariness, guards carefully every trace of his sojourn. But it was in Berlin, I remember, that the pathos of his baffled career came home to me most powerfully. The great capital of United Germany resembles very little the inconsiderable town of the last century from which it has grown, and which Lessing knew. Here he suffered some of his bitterest disappointments; here he enjoyed some of his most precious friendships; here did some of his manliest work. Changed though the city is, its suggestions in some ways are what they were in Lessing's time, and as one goes through its streets he can make real to himself what must have been the mood of the humane cosmopolite. In his time, the days of Frederick, there was something martial at every turn. It was the city of men whose main business had come to be warfare, in whose breasts there was no broader feeling than a love for Prussia. It is scarcely different now.

It was already evening of one of the long days at the end of May when I saw, for the first time, the great sand plains which one must cross between Dresden and Berlin. Nature has done little to make the region attractive, but the spirit of strife has lent it tragic associations. There is scarcely an acre that has not drunk blood in some historic contest, or at least been jarred by cannon-thunder from some great battle-field close by. Towards midnight the glare of the lights of the capital

began to whiten the heavens to the northward. Going out early the next morning, I stood presently in a broad avenue. In the centre ran a wide promenade, lined by rows of tall, full-foliaged trees; on each side a crowded road-way, bordered by stately buildings. Close by towered up, till the head of the rider was on a level with the eaves of the houses, a colossal equestrian figure in bronze, in cocked hat, booted and spurred; the skin tense over the muscles of the bridle-hand, as it reined in the charger; the wrinkles plain, made by care, in the rider's face; life-like, as if the bronze warrior might dismount any moment, if he chose. In the distance, down the long perspective of trees, was a lofty gate, supported by Corinthian columns, on the top a figure of Victory in a chariot drawn by horses. Close at hand again, under the porch of a square, strong structure, stood two straight sentinels. A handsome officer came down the pavement, his sword rattling on the stones. Instantly the two sentinels stepped back in concert, as if the same clock-work regulated their movements, brought their shining pieces with perfect precision to the "present," stood for an instant as if hewn from stone, the spiked helmets above the blonde faces inclining backward at exactly the same angle, then precisely together fell into the old position. The street was "Unter den Linden;" the huge statue was the memorial of Frederick the Great; the gate down the long vista was the Brandenburger Thor, surmounted by the charioted Victory which Napoleon carried to Paris after Jena,

and which came back after Waterloo. The solid building was the palace of the kaiser, and when the clock-work sentinels went through their salute with such straight precision, the first sight was gained of that famous Prussian discipline against which, before that summer was finished,¹ supple France was to crush its teeth all to fragments, like a viper incautiously biting at a file.

The whole aspect of Berlin is military. Near by lies a great tract of country, fenceless and houseless, reserved exclusively for reviews; in every quarter tower the garrisons for the troops. The statues and public memorials are mostly in honor of great soldiers and victories. In one place stands old Blücher, muffled in his cloak, and glaring over his shoulder as if he saw a French column marching round the corner by the opera-house close by. At his right stands Yorck, at his left Gneisenau, and across the street are Scharnhorst and Bülow. The great elector towers in another place, on horseback; elsewhere are the old Dessauer, who helped Marlboro at Malplaquet, and Schwerin in queue and knee-breeches, the black-eagle banner in his hand, as he fell charging—a gray-beard of eighty—at Kollin; these and many more. There are tall columns too to commemorate a victory here, or the crushing out of revolutionary spirit somewhere else; far more rarely a statue to a poet or statesman, or a civilian in any department. On “Unter den Linden” the sentinels are always before the king’s palace, the

¹ 1870.

palace of the crown prince, at the arsenal, at the main guard-house,—almost all the way from the old castle on the Spree, at one end, to the Brandenburger Thor at the other. Groups of grenadiers are in every street and garden. Each café and promenade has its elegant officers. Batteries of artillery roll by at any time, obedient to their bugles; squadrons of Uhlans ride up to salute the kaiser. Each day at noon swells through the roar of the streets martial music, first a sound of trumpets, then a deafening roll from a score of brazen drums. A heavy detachment of infantry wheels out from some barracks—ranks of strong, brown-haired men, stretching from sidewalk to sidewalk, perfectly appointed in every thread and accoutrement, dropping at intervals, section after section, to do the unbroken guard duty at the various posts. Meantime to the main guard-house gather the officers on duty at Berlin, in flashing uniform, the acme of military splendor.

Such constant suggestions of war are painful,—such apparatus for blood-shedding, such application of energy to the work of destruction, such blunting of the finer nature. The city has grown, but the spirit of the place cannot be far different from what it was in the days of Leuthen and Künersdorf. The Prussian still prefers war-songs to the holy melodies of love. The shout of Thor, rushing on to crush his enemies with his hammer, charms him more than any gentler faith, with its utterance of peace. There is more pomp and evidence of power; the narrow patriotism which had no love beyond Prussia has

broadened so that it includes all Germany. But the temper is no milder, nor has the patriotism become the wide-reaching sentiment embracing all mankind.

Here, then, walked the man of lofty spirit who hated the "fatal thing called war," and said that "what cost blood was certainly not worth blood." For such words the ears of those days had no hospitality; he who uttered them had scarcely a place to lay his head. But the man was too great to be forgotten entirely. The recognition which has been accorded him here among the soldiers is thoroughly characteristic. Frederick sits mounted among the tree-tops of "Unter den Linden," and about the pedestal are crowded the life-size figures of the men of his age whom Prussia holds most worthy of remembrance. At the four corners ride the duke of Brunswick and cunning Prince Heinrich, old Ziethen the Hussar, and Seydlitz, who threw Soubise into rout at Rossbach. Between are a score or more of soldiers of lesser note, — the Scotchman Keith, who fell in the early morning twilight at Hochkirch, and, more interesting than all, Tauentzien, Lessing's friend, — only soldiers, spurred and girt with sabres, except on the very back of the pedestal, and there just at the tail of the king's horse, in the most undistinguished place, stand Kant, peer of Plato and Bacon, and at his side the noble presence of Lessing. Just standing-room for them among the horses and uniforms, at the tail of Frederick's steed! The statue of Lessing rises serene, tall, unbending, with gaze fixed as if upon some far-off pleasant prospect, — as if he saw the day when, in

the long education of the human race, his time should come. The sculptor builded perhaps wiser than he knew,—the back of the king turned so squarely upon the figure of the great writer, the hoofs of the war-horse within easy striking distance. So was he regarded by the great and powerful of the land of which he was the most illustrious ornament. He was the prophet of change. Like prophets in general, there were feet ready to trample on him, and he was only saved by his extraordinary strength. “The influence of his life,” said Göthe, “cannot perish through long ages.” In literature, in art, in politics and philosophy, we see in Lessing the dawn of a new day. And in religion? Did he go utterly astray? “Thou, Luther,” he once wrote, “great man, ill understood, thou hast freed us from the yoke of tradition; who will free us from the more intolerable yoke of the letter?”¹ In answer to the enquiry, a man of genius exclaims, “I say Lessing continued Luther’s work. When Luther had freed us from tradition, the letter ruled as tyrannically as tradition had done. In freeing men from this tyrannical letter, Lessing has done most. His voice is loudest in the battle. Here he swings his sword most joyfully, and it lightens and slays.”² The world may yet set the two mighty strivers side by side.

Into the gems of the priestly breast-plate, in that ancient Hebrew tale, the breast-plate worn by

¹ Anti-Götze in Zimmern’s Life.

² Heinrich Heine: Ueber Deutschland.

Aaron and his sons, it was believed that God Himself from time to time descended, filling them with supernal splendor, thus making known his purposes and helping Israel to decision. So, in the Bible's words, "They bore judgment on their hearts before the Lord continually." It seems to me that this leader of men was not without some such inspiration — the Urim and Thummim — that he received in his soul more abundant measure of "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world," and so, in a noble sense, "bore judgment!"

CHAPTER XI.

KLOPSTOCK, WIELAND, AND HERDER.

Turning from the great figure of Lessing, who stands like Moses among his people, guiding them to things beautiful, but himself dying before the day of glory is reached, we have now to consider three men of importance, — Klopstock, Wieland, and Herder, — one of whom, Herder, is scarcely less great than he who so nobly “ bore judgment,” although his greatness was of a different kind. All were young men when Lessing’s influence began to become paramount, coming forward into eminence with him, or while he sat supreme ; when he died, holding for a moment the immortal light, until it was transferred at length to the true torch-bearers of the gods, the transcendent men from whom the literature of Germany was to receive its noblest illumination.

As has been seen, the two rival schools of criticism, — that of Gottsched and his followers, at Leipzig, on the one hand, that of Bodmer and Breitinger, at Zürich (known as the Swiss), on the other, — battled stoutly over many points. As Gottsched liked the French, the Swiss liked the English ; they blamed French writers as being formal and artificial, demanded nature, and loved Shakespeare and

Milton, whom they sought to make widely known. Their hearty effort the school of Gottsched as heartily opposed, declaring that English poets would never receive recognition, much less be imitated, in Germany. It was therefore a great triumph for the Swiss, when in 1748, three cantos of an epic poem appeared, called the "Messias," whose author had manifestly been influenced by Milton, — a poem which brilliantly justified their views, and aroused among Germans immediate enthusiasm. It was the production of a youth scarcely beyond his twentieth year, a theological student at Jena, coming thither from Quedlinburg, in Saxony, — Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock. His boyhood had been spent for the most part in the country; he was a good classical scholar, also of sincere piety; he plainly also knew the "Paradise Lost," although he followed his model in no servile spirit. The omens were unpropitious for Gottsched. If the "Messias" conquered its way to recognition, his prestige was lost; he fought it with critical thunder, and whatever other batteries he could influence opened with him to destroy the apparition. It was all in vain; Gottsched's real services were forgotten; from the appearance of the "Messias" the prestige of the Leipsic school was broken, and Zürich triumphed.

The "Messias" of Klopstock was important in other ways than as deciding the controversy between the cities. Though modelled upon Milton, as Milton is thought by some to have derived some hints from the Anglo-Saxon poet, Cædmon, it was the first great epic poem since the days of the Hohen-

stauffen in which the German spirit moved independently. In all other directions Germans had accomplished something. Lyrics had been written ; there was a dramatic literature of a certain kind ; some philosophy, and overmuch theology ; but the field of the epic had lain fallow. The nation considered that the gap was now nobly filled, and the young Klopstock was set beside the greatest poets. Bodmer at once invited him to Zürich, where, however, he offended the over-severe magnate by a cheerfulness which seems to have been innocent enough, but which was thought inconsistent with the character of a religious poet. He was invited to Copenhagen, and a pension given him, that he might complete the "Messias." As is so often the case in the history of authorship, the first accomplishment of Klopstock was the best, or at least the most successful. The instalments of his epic, as they appeared at intervals during the following years, met with a reception descending gradually from the first enthusiasm toward indifference. He lived to a great age, showing through life a strongly-marked character and sincere piety, never forfeiting the respect of his countrymen, although his fame was soon eclipsed by the greater figures that appeared upon the scene.

It is for the "Messias" that Klopstock will be mainly remembered, but there was still another department of poetry in which his accomplishment was important. Besides religion, another great idea filled his soul, that of patriotism, and the time in which he appeared was a favorable one for the in-

fluence of one so disposed and gifted to be felt to the utmost. In his young manhood the victories of Frederick the Great stirred the hearts of the nation, and prepared them to listen with enthusiasm to the tones of a lyre strung for the Fatherland. At this time Klopstock sung the victories of Hermann in the old day, and revived in the hearts of Germans an interest in the faith of their heathen ancestors. From Frederick himself he turned away, believing him to be a despot, directing his glance toward the past, for he felt there was no present Germany. He had a spirit that was full of love for freedom everywhere. He was earnest in his sympathy for America in the struggle with George III.; earnest too in behalf of France at the time of the revolution, until the excesses caused in him, as in so many others who at first hailed the uprising with joy, a terrified reaction.

Since the "Messias" so surpasses in interest the other works of Klopstock, let us proceed to consider this more carefully, omitting further mention of the rest. Klopstock had the intention to represent poetically the history of Jesus as given in the gospels. The simple choice of such a subject had much to do with the admiration felt for the poet by his contemporaries. The cultivated world was then, in the main, religious, and rejoiced to have a German venture forth in emulation of the much-praised Briton.

Looking at the subject technically,¹ it is right to say that the story of Christ is not well adapted for

¹ Kurz.

epic treatment. The facts are so few and simple that the poet is driven to inventions. Since it is necessary to introduce the Deity, the mightiest pictures seem trifling; they must exist within the limitations of time and space, and every limitation contradicts divinity. Just so with the world of spirits, which must be introduced to mediate between God and man. Though Christianity includes a belief in angels, these beings reach no definite individuality; they are abstractions, or figures of allegory. A great epic genius might perhaps be able to conquer the hindrance, but it was beyond the power of Klopstock. His angels are mere messengers of the Eternal, without distinction of character; they are never individuals; indeed, his human figures are not firmly individualized. It is claimed indeed that in this epic all proper epic spirit is wanting. A felicitous plan, an artistic ordering of events, the graphic representation of personalities,—for all these we must search the “Messias” in vain. Judged, however, as a succession of lyrical passages, poetic expressions of lofty emotion, the verdict is different. In this direction Klopstock is truly great. He first saw that an inspired mood must have an inspired utterance. He considered the speech of the people unpoetic, and claimed that poetry must be distinguished from prose by *unusualness*. He might easily have fallen into pomposity, but was kept from this by his good sense and the influence exerted over him by the ancient simple writers, noticeably Luther. Strength and novelty characterize his lines. He reproduced old words, made new words, and in his management

of the particles by means of which, in German as in Greek, a shading so delicate can be given to the expression of an idea, he is only surpassed by the greatest writers. His style had great nobleness, power, and point, making his presentations effective and exalting. When he represents the emotions of a Christian believer, the great bliss of the pious, or his absorption into eternal love; when he lends words to enthusiastic devotion, or represents the soul tortured by doubt, conscience in despair, the heart smitten with anguish, then he is unsurpassable. He writes almost with the dignity and power of the psalmist, and the reader is carried away as by a sounding storm. The parables are almost the only part of the "Messias" that can be called epic; in these the first half is particularly rich. He sometimes tries to express emotion where none really exists, and there are passages which are characterized as sentimental, childish, sweetish, trivial; but we may justly call him a great lyric poet, — indeed, Herder pays him the tribute that, in place of the poetry of the intellect and wit which had existed before, he created that of heart and feeling. These words of Vilmar seem to be justly and finely said: "Let us enjoy his greatness, and forget, with the majority of his contemporaries who hung upon him in pious feeling, his defects. Let us rejoice in the gleaming morning-star which arose in him for our literature, and quarrel not with the morning-star that it became no sun. His grave, at Ottersen, under the linden, where he rests at the side of his wife, will remain a revered spot forevermore for

every German who has the courage to be at the same time a German and a Christian."

The influence of Klopstock upon his generation was profound, winning over to a respect for German literature a multitude of the best and most sober-minded, so preparing the way in this class for a good reception of the mightier spirits who were to follow him. Noticeable among his disciples were the young men of the Hain-Bund,—the "Grove Fraternity,"—certain students of the University of Göttingen, who, meeting in a grove of oaks near that town by moonlight, covered themselves romantically with chaplets, devoting themselves to patriotic poetry, and vowing to celebrate the birthday of Klopstock as their leader. There are names among the members of the Hain-Bund that, in a work less general than the present, should have attentive consideration,—particularly the translator Voss, and the ballad-writer Bürger,—but I must content myself with a mere mention of their names.

Side by side with Klopstock lived a writer differing much from that earnest Puritan in gifts and character, whom we must briefly estimate,—Christoph Martin Wieland. He was a few years younger than Klopstock; at the beginning, a precocious, impressive boy, vacillating between pietism and free-thinking, according to the influences that surrounded him. He wrote religious and patriotic poems, through which, like his famous leader, he drew the attention of the veteran Bodmer, and in his turn was hospitably invited to Zürich. Bright and re-

ceptive, he studied here for two years, becoming accomplished especially in Greek and English, and drawing to himself the notice of the world by a sharp critique of an amiable writer, conceived in a spirit of pietism, and quite unjust. The paper drew the notice of Lessing, who, while recognizing the ability of the writer, sought, by a stinging reply, to lead him from his errors, and at the same time defend a man unjustly judged. The means was effective. The scales fell from Wieland's eyes, and he came soon after to a recognition of the path for which his powers really fitted him. The patronage of certain dignitaries gave him opportunity to become acquainted with the world of fashion and rank. The Duchess Amalie of Weimar selected him to be the tutor of her sons, and henceforth most of his long life was spent in an illustrious circle, of which presently there will be much to say. At twenty-five he wrote his poem called "Musarion," which established his fame and proved that he had found his work. What Sterne is in English literature is Wieland in German, except that we may say perhaps that the German is a somewhat more solid entity. Wieland had a blooming fancy, lively wit, great sensibility, good taste, and acuteness. He was a story-teller full of ease and delicate grace, borrowing his materials generally from the "Märchen Welt," the world of fairy tales; and it is one of his chief titles to distinction that he first wrought in this vein, the pioneer of a multitude of men of genius who in times after him made themselves famous here, the last and best known in the list,

perhaps, Hans Christian Andersen. As a poet his verse is most harmonious, with a rhythm full of easy freedom and variety, strongly in contrast with Klopstock's mighty, high-sounding line. His ease and grace were gained only by hard labor. "It ought to be reckoned as a slight desert," he says characteristically, "that I was never tired of licking my bears into shape as they were born, and making them as presentable as I could." He was wanting in power of invention, but had a happy faculty of elaborating what might be furnished to him. His greatest and most complete work is "Oberon," of which Göthe said: "As long as poetry remains poetry, gold gold, and crystal crystal, it will be loved and admired as a masterpiece of poetic art." The story of Oberon is taken from an old French romance, "Huon of Bordeaux," and has its scene in the East and fairy-land. The real and fanciful world are well blended together,—the one depending upon the other. The adventures of the mortal hero and heroine are skilfully united with the story of the quarrel and reconciliation of Oberon and Titania,—something in the manner of the "Midsummer-Night's Dream" of Shakespeare,—and all is made clear and symmetrical. In his romances, Wieland in no way reaches the artistic height of his poems. He is prolix, full of long digressions, so that the unity of his works is much injured; but even when garrulous he is bright and charming. His scenes are almost always in Greece, or the far East, but the personages are Germans or French of Wieland's time. Often the delineations, like Swift's Lillipu-

tians and Brobdignagians in Gulliver, are made the vehicles of fine satire. Sometimes his gaiety stoops to licentiousness; and here too, as in so many other respects, he resembles his English contemporary, Sterne.

Among the romances the Abderites is particularly witty and pleasant, in which he employs an assumed antiquity to veil a satire on the petty incidents and foibles of life in a provincial town. The Abderites are a people ironically styled wise; they erect a fountain, with costly sculptures, and forget, until all is done, that there is not water enough to moisten the nose of a single dolphin; they place a beautiful statue of Venus—a masterpiece of which they are very proud—on a pedestal so high that the statue becomes well-nigh invisible, the idea being that in this way it may be well seen by all travellers approaching the city. But the long account of the great lawsuit in Abdera is the most amusing part of the story. In the city there was only one dentist, who had an extensive practice in the neighborhood, and travelled from place to place. On one occasion he had an ass and its driver to carry his baggage across a wide heath. It was a hot and bright summer's day, and the weary dentist was glad to sit down and rest awhile in the shadow cast from the figure of the ass. Against this appropriation of a shade the driver, who was also the owner of the ass, protested, saying that nothing had been said in the bargain about any such use of the shadow. The dentist must therefore either come out of the shade, or pay something extra for its use. He refused

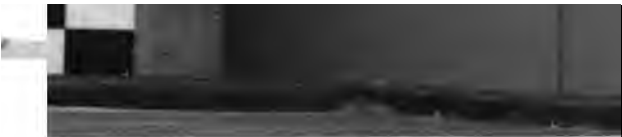
to do so, and a lawsuit was the result ; the best lawyers of Abdera were employed on each side, and the whole population of the town was soon divided into parties styled respectively " Asses " and " Shadows." So bitter was their enmity that an " ass " would not sit down at the same table with a " shadow." It was a biting and effective satire upon prevailing forms of litigation.

Wieland, then, following the influence of Klopstock, and at first taking a direction for which he was not fitted, at length discovered his true path, and had an important influence in rectifying a certain one-sidedness in the views of his former teacher. Klopstock, as we have seen, had breathed into the language strength, majesty, and poetic life, given it a power such as it had not before possessed for the expression of exalted emotions, like patriotism and religion. With the advantage came a certain turgid stiffness—a departure from simplicity—which was ill adapted especially to the representation of things cheerful and charming, and even to the ordinary relations of life. Wieland showed that German could deal also with the light and sportive,—was available for merry jest as well as dignified sobriety ; and while he did so, touched sometimes upon the frivolous and immoral.

Klopstock and Lessing had won the religious and intellectual classes ; so Wieland gained unbounded popularity with the world of elegant fashion, whom the greater writers were too grave to reach. Heretofore the elegant world had recognized no culture but the French, and not believed in the possibility

of a readable German book. To Wieland belongs the credit of winning from them some respect for their despised mother-tongue, and he may, therefore, be mentioned with the grander names who were preparing for the new day, trifling though he may be in comparison. His popularity was immense; Napoleon gave him the ribbon of the Legion of Honor; Alexander of Russia made him a noble. He wrought his vein with true German patience, doing some of his best work beyond his seventieth year, showing to the world at last forty-two solid volumes of accomplishment. His sunny, amiable nature made him a favorite, and one is drawn toward him more strongly than toward many of his greater contemporaries, when we read that he was singularly free from envy and unmanly sensitiveness. It should be reckoned among his deserts that he appreciated and translated Shakespeare.

Following Wieland, after an interval of a decade, contemporary, but making his influence felt a little later, appears a figure greater than either, and only second to the mightiest,—that of Johann Gottfried Herder. At Mohrungen, among the Poles, in East Prussia, he was born, the son of a poor villager who combined the office of teacher of the girls' school with that of bell-ringer and singer in the choir. From the first the boy was pious, and interested in books and music, and when he was sixteen the dean of the parish, seeing his intelligence, took him into his household, where he found opportunity to study. From the first he had re-



markable power of impressing himself. The surgeon of a Russian regiment, temporarily in the village, offered to take him to Königsberg to study medicine, and afterwards to St. Petersburg. Herder had no inclination in this direction, but accepted the offer as likely to lead out into a broader opportunity for culture. We soon find him a student of theology, filling his mind with extraordinary avidity, and becoming a favorite with Kant, then rising into fame. Kant's strictly philosophical lectures appear to have pleased him less than those in astronomy and physics, although the thinker possessed at that time his youthful eloquence, and used a much clearer language than his later scholastic technicalities. Kant encouraged him, and often gave him his own manuscripts to criticise. At Königsberg lived also a mystical thinker named Hamann, a man of many ideas, but with no faculty of clear expression, from whom Herder caught an enthusiasm for English writers, particularly Shakespeare and Ossian, and gained many notions which affected his subsequent career. At twenty we find him in the city of Riga, making himself even then famous as a teacher and preacher, and publishing writings which go beyond the local circles. Soon after, he sets out upon travels, — for those days extensive, — seeing, besides Germany, the Netherlands and France, where he spends some months in Paris, getting rid of provincial prejudices and broadening his culture by visits to theatres, libraries, and art collections. The prince of Holstein Oldenburg takes him as a tutor, in which position he has still further opportunities.

At length at Strassburg, in 1770, where he goes temporarily for surgical help for a trouble of the eye, he makes an acquaintance, for him the most important of his life, and full of consequence to the world. It was at the Hotel de l'Esprit. It is well to give a particular picture of so memorable an interview, and fortunately we have the means of doing so in the account of one of the personages concerned. Herder one day stood at the foot of the staircase, about to ascend to his room. He was tall ; his face was round, his forehead large and commanding ; his nose somewhat short ; although his lips were rather too thick, his mouth was agreeably formed. His eyes, heavily shaded by black eyebrows, were piercing, the effect not destroyed by the inflammation to which one of them was subject. He wore his hair curled and dressed ; his coat was black, and over it was thrown a long silk cloak of the same color. The costume was elegant, and, together with a certain delicacy and decorum in his bearing, seemed to mark him as a clergyman. He was now twenty-seven years old. As he began the ascent to his room he was accosted by a youth of twenty-one, of the most striking appearance. He was above the middle size, and superbly formed,—the ideal of symmetry and strength in every limb. His face was beautiful as that of an antique divinity, the eyes in particular, having pupils uncommonly large, and all alive with an extraordinary ardor. He was dressed in the costume of a student, and accosted Herder with the *nonchalance* of that class, as if he were an old acquaintance. Herder was pleased with the

young man's open manner, and responded civilly. Out of the chance meeting a conversation arose, which became animated, and when the two parted the student requested permission to come again, which Herder granted with pleasure. The handsome student was the young Göthe.¹

They came together again and again, and Göthe, in his autobiography, gives us the particulars of the intimacy. Herder liked the student, but seems to have had no appreciation then of the extraordinary genius he possessed, describing him in a letter as somewhat too light and sparrow-like. Göthe, on his part, was strongly drawn toward Herder. He was at this time all at sea as to his career,—a dabbler in medicine, in art, in literature; full of animal spirits, giving frequent scandal to his decorous friends by his wild escapades. Herder inspired him through his powerful character and great attainments. Göthe told him unreservedly of his pursuits and aspirations, and although often treated with imperious harshness, a fault which Herder never lost, submitted himself in a wonderful way to his influence. In the hope of receiving benefit in his infirmity, Herder underwent painful surgical operations, Göthe standing at his side. The experience cemented their friendship, the one admiring the great fortitude with which the suffering was encountered, the other grateful for the sympathy shown. "Such of my elders," says Göthe, "as I had hitherto associated with had tried to improve

¹ Lewes' Life of Göthe.

me by too great indulgence. But as to Herder, his approbation was never to be reckoned upon, no matter in what way it might be sought. My strong attachment to and respect for him, the dissatisfaction with myself he excited in me, kept me in a state of internal contention which I had never before experienced. * * * I found myself initiated, on a sudden, into all the attempts and views of our literary men, in which he himself appeared to take an active part. * * * From Herder I learned to look upon poetry from a new point of view, with which I was much pleased. That of the Hebrews, the popular songs, the primitive examples of poetry everywhere, all proved, in his opinion, that poetry was not the privilege of a few individuals, polished by careful cultivation, but an inherent faculty in the human mind. I engaged with eagerness in all the studies, and my avidity to learn equalled the generous zeal of my instructor.”¹ In short, it may be said that the acquaintance — while for Herder it changed the course of his life, in ways which will be spoken of presently, — for Göthe, was one of the most important turning-points of his career, deciding him perhaps to adopt literature as his calling, and giving him views which prevailed with him through life. The power of Herder’s character, running out sometimes into arrogance, but still very impressive, is shown in the way in which he dominated even so remarkable a man as Göthe. “Herder, Herder!” bursts out the superb youth, “if I am

¹ Dichtung und Wahrheit.

destined to be only your satellite, so will I be, and willingly and truly, a friendly moon to your earth. But you must feel that I would rather be a planet,—Mercury even, the smallest of the seven,—to revolve with you about the sun, than the first of the five which turn around Saturn.”

It was the influence of Herder which turned Göthe to literature; Göthe, in turn, shaped the whole life-course of Herder. A few years more follow, of astonishing acquirement and constant writing, during which Herder rises more and more upon the world. At length, when thirty-two, at Göthe's suggestion, he is invited to Weimar, to a high ecclesiastical position, which he accepts, becoming at last the head of the church in the grand duchy. He discharges with zeal the duties of his place, and accomplishes, as will be seen, wonders in work of a more general character. At one time he sees Italy; for the most part he remains in Weimar, revered by great and humble, subduing those who surround him by an extraordinary personal power, affecting all Europe through his pen, leading a life blameless and fruitful for good, until he dies, in 1803, at the age of fifty-six.

Both in poetry and prose the work and influence of Herder have been of immense importance. Like Lessing, he had really little original poetic talent, but had a power, never equalled before or since, of receiving into his mind all poetic life, and reproducing it again with perfect truth.¹ He taught

¹ Kurz.

that in poetry it was not enough that the form should be artistic (preceding critics had been satisfied to speak merely of rhyme and metre); antecedent to this must come the poetic comprehension of life and its phenomena, that this was the living spring, the same in all times and lands, and that it is to be found at its purest in the folk-song, the poetry of the people. He taught that poetry was as necessary a human expression as language; that however manifold the forms might be, the source was always the same. This theory, again and again enunciated, he illustrated by multitudes of examples. He sought a knowledge of the folk-songs of all times and races. He first introduced to Germans the Oriental literatures, making known the Hindoo *Sacontala*, imitating from the Persian, as well as translating from the Hebrew. He was fully at home with the songs of Greece and Rome, called attention to the value of the old German memorials, and penetrated to the four corners of the earth, while he sought what he loved in all modern literatures. For Bishop Percy's "*Reliques*" he felt extraordinary enthusiasm, and knew as well the ballads of Spain and Russia.

One is filled with awe at the research of this superb enthusiast, — so catholic, so tireless, with sense so unerring in the hunt for pearls near and far away! In his heaping volumes, we are now in the Rose-garden of Saadi; now striving with the Moors in splendid elaborations of the Spanish ballads of the *Cid*; now it is Horace and Persius; now some Brahminic outpouring. On one page flows an idyl

of Theocritus ; on another a Lapland lover sings to his mistress, or we hear the passion of a Persian maid. Now we are swept on by the artless power of a Scotch ballad ; now by the holy pulsing of a psalm. Here it is the wild rhyme of a Norse scald ; here a breath from Sicily, calling up orange groves upon opal seas ; a Chinese ditty, or an Indian war-song. They are reproductions, not translations. Herder himself best describes his method. Speaking of his renderings from one poet, where he did as always, he says : “ I followed the spirit of his muse, not every one of his words and pictures. In his lyrics I kept the peculiar tone of each in my ear, the import and outline of the same in my eye. I have not lent him beauties, but perhaps done away with blemishes, because I honored his great genius too much to expose him here. Where his poem appeared to want something in distinctness, I deepened the outlines with a light hand, as with an old drawing. Generally speaking, I was more occupied with the spirit which breathes in his poems than with the clothing, although this charmed me much.”

Thus, with the rarest learning, he collected grains of gold from a thousand books, preserving the peculiarities of the different times and lands, of different characters and conditions, marking the finest transitions ; the delicate shadings — the most subtle coloring — stamped in with perfect truth and fidelity. He had little creative fancy. His own poems, when compared with his renderings, seem far inferior. His gift was that of appropriating the foreign, fathoming and reproducing again the most

concealed beauties and sense. Of the many volumes in which his labors in this direction are contained, the work called the "Spirit of Hebrew Poetry" has, perhaps more than any other, gained the admiration of his countrymen and the world. There, in psalm and prophetic rhapsody, the passion is of the sublimest, and, like a marvellous conduit, the soul of Herder pours it all forth in floods as warm, as abundant, as quickening.

The prose writings of Herder are as numerous as his poetical labors. He first gained attention by pieces of literary criticism contributed to the periodicals of the time, and while still very young wrote a treatise on the "Origin of Language," which was crowned by the Berlin Academy. Theology and philosophy received attention from his prolific mind; he was also the first preacher of his day.¹ Passing over the briefer labors, let us turn at once to his *magnum opus*, — the "Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity," — a vast work, superb in every way, of extraordinary erudition and wonderful grasp, a work deserving a place among the mightiest accomplishments of the human mind. We cannot say that Herder created the philosophy of history. Bossuet, in France, had preceded him; so too the profound Italian, Vico, and later still, Voltaire. Herder proceeded, however, upon an original plan, which he developed with most extraordinary elaboration. "When I was quite young," he says in his preface, "when the fields of knowl-

¹ Kurz.

edge yet lay before me in all their morning beauty, from which the mid-day sun of our life draws so much, the thought often occurred to me whether, when all in the world has its philosophy and science, that which touches us most closely, the history of humanity, ought not to have a philosophy and science. Everything called this to my mind,—metaphysics and ethics, physics and natural history. The God who in nature has arranged everything according to measure, number, and weight; who has ordered the essence of things accordingly, their forms and associations, their course and maintenance, so that from the great world-building to the dust-grain, from the power that holds sun and earth to the thread of a spider-web, only one wisdom, goodness, and power rules; He who in the human body, and in the powers of the human soul, has considered everything so wonderfully, so divinely, that if we venture to think after the Omniscient we lose ourselves in an abyss of His thoughts,—how, said I to myself, should this God, in determining and creating OUR RACE, have *departed* from His wisdom and goodness, and have had here no plan? Or did He want to conceal it from us, since He showed us in the lower creation, which little concerns us, so many of the prescriptions of His eternal law? ”

Long before his great work appears, then, its ideas were occupying him. Of the twenty-five books projected, twenty only were finished, the remainder existing only in plan; but as I give you the sketch, you will not wonder they were left in-

complete. The first five books, which form the first part, contain the foundation of the work, partly in a general sketch of our dwelling-place, the material universe, partly in a review of the organizations which enjoy with us the light of the sun. He regards the earth at first as part of the universe with relation to the other worlds ; then in itself according to its constitution. He represents it as a great workshop for the organization of very different beings, and examines the various kingdoms of nature — animal, vegetable, and mineral — in their relation to man. He dwells longest upon the animal kingdom, shows the nature of its creatures, their difference from man ; then passes to the consideration of man himself, his being and task. In part second, from book sixth to book tenth, he shows the organization of different races, according to their dwelling-places, so different in situation, climate, and soil, drawing the conclusion of the unity of the human race ; that while, to be sure, outward circumstances have the most decisive influence upon bodily and mental constitution, for men an inner power has been created, which everywhere appears the same, and must be regarded as the mother of all development. The particular form which the life-power has once impressed on the mind and activity of man, under the coöperation of outward circumstances, is transmitted through tradition and habit ; and so, among other things, forms of government and religion are transmitted heritages. This leads him to the investigation of the question where the forming centre and oldest home of man is, and to the setting

forth of the Asiatic declarations about the creation of the earth, and the oldest written traditions of the origin of the human race. In the third part, from book eleventh to book fifteenth, the historical development of particular races is treated. Proceeding from China, he gradually considers the most important Asiatic nations, and devotes two books, which are among the best of the work, to the Greeks and the Romans. In the fifteenth book, which was much praised by Göthe, Herder enthusiastically unfolds the course of human development from antiquity to modern times. Humanity is the aim of human nature, and to this end God has given into the hands of our race its own fate. All the destructive powers in nature must not only, in course of time, submit to the maintaining powers, but also serve in the development of the whole ; and since reason and propriety, according to the laws of their inner nature, must always win more space among men, they must all the more further a permanent condition of the race, since at the same time a wise goodness rules in the fate of men. In the fourth part the Middle Ages are considered, the origin and course of Christianity are detailed, the influence of the papacy and Mahometanism discussed, their more important phenomena touched upon,—as, the course of commerce, chivalry, the crusades, the geographical discoveries. But here stopped the busy hand and brain.

Upon its first appearance, the marvellous work encountered opposition. The science and philosophy even of that time found fault with the discus-

sions of the first part. This book—the whole work, indeed—contained much which even then had to be rejected as without foundation, far more which our later progress has found untenable. Even what is purely historical is often faultily comprehended. Still, Herder's "Ideas for the Philosophy of History" is a work significant and important, like the "Novum Organum" of Bacon, because it led the way to a profounder comprehension of history; because it showed that in particular phenomena a general, uniting thought lives, which expresses itself certainly never completely, often only very poorly, but guides the whole race of man. Most powerful has been the "Philosophy of History" in its influence. Therein lies not merely many a germ which was developed later by others; few books have so wrought upon the world's general culture as this. It passed over to such an extent into the possession of the cultivated that, as Göthe well says, "Only a few of those who now read it are instructed by it for the first time; for through the hundredfold borrowings from it they have been fully instructed in other connections."¹ What is true of Germans is true too of us. The great thoughts of Herder have passed into the consciousness of the race,—become the very axioms and first principles upon which we act, believing them to be born with us. The "Philosophy of History" laid the foundation upon which scores of great thinkers since his time have builded. Here Karl Ritter found the germ

¹ Eckermann's *Gespräche*.

which he developed into his Physical Geography; hence Hegel and Humboldt took their starting-point. And not alone in Germany; Guizot in France, Buckle and Lecky in England, Draper in America, — all in fact who grapple deeply with the problem of human development, — must owe their debt to the mighty Weimar preacher.

Here are a few sentences which will perhaps help the reader to understand the grasp, the eloquent sweep, the noble humanity, of Herder's prose:

* * * "Why was it denied thee, thou transcendent, magnificent Hannibal, to prevent the ruin of thy fatherland, and after the victory at Cannæ, hasten straight to the den of thy wolf-like, hereditary foe?"

* * * "Whithersoever my look turns, it beholds destruction; for everywhere did these conquerors of the world leave the same traces. Had the Romans been really the emancipators of Greece, under which magnanimous name they had themselves announced at the Isthmian games to this race, which had become childish, how differently they would have proceeded! But when Paulus Æmilius causes seventy cities of Epirus to be plundered, and a hundred and fifty thousand men to be sold as slaves, merely to reward his army; when Metellus and Silanus devastate and rob Macedonia; Mummius, Corinth; Sulla, Athens and Delphi, as scarcely any other cities in the world have been maltreated; when this ruin extends itself to the islands of Greece, and Rhodes, Cyprus, and Crete have no better fate than Greece itself, namely, to become toll-houses for tribute and places for plundering for the triumphs

of Rome ; when the last king of Macedonia, with his sons, is first led about in triumph, then left to languish in the most wretched of dungeons ; when the last sparks of Grecian freedom in the Ætolian and Achaian leagues are destroyed, and at length the whole land becomes a battle-field, on which the rapacious, devastating hordes of the triumvirs at last slay one another, — O, Greece ! what a fate does thy protectress bring upon thee — thy instructress, Rome, teacher of the world ! All that is left to us from thee is ruins, which the barbarians carried with them as booty of their triumph, that all of noble art which humanity had ever devised might utterly perish !

* * * “Of Gaul there is little to say, since we know of its subjugation only from the bulletins of its conqueror. For ten years it cost Cæsar incredible toil and all the force of his great soul. Although he was more noble-minded than any Roman, he could not change his Roman nature, and won the sad renown ‘of having fought in fifty pitched battles, besides the civil wars, and of having slain in arms eleven hundred and ninety-two thousand men.’ Most of these were Gallic souls. Where are the many spirited and courageous races of this great land ? Where was their force and bravery, their numbers and vigor, when, after centuries, wild hordes fell upon them and shared them as slaves ? Even the name of this mighty people is extinguished, — its religion, culture, and tongue. Ye souls great and noble, Scipios and Cæsar, what thought ye, what felt ye, when, as departed spirits,

from the starry heavens ye looked upon Rome,—the robber cave,—and the completion of your own murderous handiwork? How soiled, in your eyes, must your honor seem; how bloody your laurels; how brutal and inhuman your butcher skill. Rome is no more. Even while it endured must every noble citizen have confessed that curses and destruction would heap themselves upon his fatherland, with all these monstrous victories of ambition!''¹

In addition to his literary greatness, Herder was one of the most impressive speakers of his time. Of oratory, as we understand it, the Germans, in the past and at present, know little. In Herder's time all free speech upon political questions was forbidden, and at present the strong imperial government will suffer no sharp popular criticism. Forensic attack and defense, which in England and America have been the occasion of such displays of human power, have been out of the question in Germany. The pulpit and chair of the professor have always given to orators in Germany their best opportunity. Herder possessed a rare gift for imparting in conversation the enthusiasm with which he overflowed. His physique was powerful and commanding; of his great intellectual and moral strength he was fully conscious; he possessed a self-assertion which, as we have seen, in a man of ordinary gifts would have been insufferable arrogance, and which, even in his case, was excessive. Even when in company with men of the greatest genius he asserted him-

¹ Book xiv, ch. 3. *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit.*

self disagreeably, — as Göthe, Schiller, and Wieland complain. “The man,” said Wieland, characteristically, “is like an electric cloud. From a distance the meteor has a splendid effect; but may the devil have such a meteor hanging over his head! I would like to have a dozen Pyrenees between him and me.”

But if in social life he was an uncomfortable companion, in the pulpit, — where, as head of the church of the land, he was entitled to speak with authority, — he swayed, like reeds shaken by the wind, the hearts of low and high. In his early life his sermons were written; later they were *ex tempore*, and of extraordinary richness. He demanded that the pulpit orators should abstain from all art, and preach simply in popular language. Says one hearer: “You should have seen how, in a few moments, he chained all outbreaks of distraction and curiosity to stillness. All hearts were opened, every eye hung upon him and enjoyed unaccustomed tears, while sighs of emotion rustled through the moved assembly. Over the gospel of the day he uttered himself with enthusiasm, with the clear, lofty simplicity which needs no word-figures, no arts of the school. So, it seems to me, did the apostles preach.” Schiller wrote of his preaching, upon an ordinary occasion: “Last Sunday I heard Herder preach for the first time. The noble sermon was extremely plain, natural, — adapted for the people. No extravagant gestures, no play with the voice, — a simple, earnest expression. One cannot fail to remark that he is conscious of his dig-

nity. The feeling too that he has universal esteem gives him self-possession and ease. He feels that he is a superior mind surrounded by minds of a lower order. His sermon pleased me better than any I have ever heard in my life." Of his address at the baptism of the hereditary prince of Weimar, Wieland wrote: "I know nothing purer, simpler, more heart-touching, more finely considered or felicitously said, either in German or any other tongue." And of the same sermon, Göthe said: "Herder preached like a god."

We have indicated the foible of his character. It was the same possessed by Macaulay, Samuel Johnson; greater yet, by Milton. From first to last he was full of a noble purity, and untiring in the application of his splendid gifts to the benefit of men. As a writer, his faults are diffuseness and a tendency to rhapsody, which, though natural and not offensive in him, when imitated by his thousand followers, worked injuriously against point and simplicity.

As I think of an image which shall best typify the great son of the poor school-master of Mohrun-gen, I find it in the bee. His life was labor; from himself he furnished nothing, but going restlessly from land to land, and through the ages of the past, with an unerring instinct he perceived where lay the honey; gathered it and hived it with industry untiring, that it might bless the world with its sweetness. Moreover, dusty with the pollen caught in his flight through a thousand fields, he swept with fructifying touch over the waiting minds of

his contemporaries, impregnating them with a life which appeared, and still appears, in forms unnumbered of beauty and fragrance !

Tranquil lies the little city of Weimar in the midst of its quietly sloping hills. On the hills waved the grain harvests of July when I approached it. From the station I went down into the shade of the streets, among the modest, venerable buildings, that possess more interest than metropolitan temples and palaces, because they have been the homes and haunts of genius. Presently I crossed the well-worn pavement about a plain, gray church. These were the walls which once echoed the eloquence of Herder, and as I gazed I thought of the tall, strong figure in the plain black robe, majestic through its associations, once worn by Luther, and established as the garb of the evangelical clergy of his country, towering before his congregation, speaking to them with the ardor and authority of a prophet. To help my fancy, close at hand stood Herder's figure in bronze, the noble head illumined, the brow heavy with thought, and beneath, the inscription, carved at the command of his ducal patron, — "Light, Love, Life." Mighty he was among the sons of men, and yet there was to come after him a mightier, treading literally within his footsteps, in this very city of Weimar, while he erected a structure compared with which even the fame of Herder is an unpretentious fane !



CHAPTER XII.


GÖTHE THE MAN.

In the world's literature of the last two hundred years, it is right, I think, to say there is no name so great as Göthe; in many ways his life is the most interesting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The family from which he sprung can be traced from the middle of the seventeenth century, at which time his great-grandfather lived as a farrier at Mansfeld, in Thuringia. With the generations that follow comes a gradual rise from this humble condition. The son of the farrier becomes a tailor, removes to Frankfort-on-the-Main, and, by a fortunate marriage with the landlady of a popular inn, acquires wealth. The son of the tailor and the landlady, Johann Caspar Göthe, is well educated, and becomes accomplished by travel in Italy. He reaches the dignity of imperial counsellor among the burghers of the free city, and marries, at length, the daughter of the chief magistrate. Here at last we have the parents of the poet. The father is cold and formal, but upright and truth-loving. From him Göthe inherits a well-built frame, an erect carriage, and measured movement, and for spiritual qualities a certain orderliness and stoicism. The reader of

Göthe's life respects the figure of the father as it is painted to us, but is not attracted by it. The figure of the mother, on the other hand, is very charming. At her marriage she is a lovely girl, simple, hearty, joyous, and affectionate; she is full of mother-wit, attractive to children, and with many accomplishments. She has health like iron. Later in life she becomes large and stately. She has always a circle of young girls about her, enthusiastic for her, and is also a favorite with poets and princes. There are many letters of hers extant, of which it is said, "There is no dead word among them."¹ While the father moves upon the scene, his figure always somewhat stern and cool, disappointed at his son's choice of a career, never cordially recognizing his success,—the mother is always a most amiable personality, full of genius, sunshine, and sympathy, even in the deep old age which she at length reaches; going almost hand in hand with her great son, to whom she gave birth when she was but eighteen, until he at last, himself an old man, bids her a heart-broken farewell.

August twenty-eighth, 1749, was the date of the girl-mother's memorable travail. The air was full at the time of the free, bold spirit which, developing, was destined, before the end of the century, to produce the French revolution. Frankfort, the centre of wide-extending traffic, was an appropriate birth-place for a cosmopolitan poet. His education, from first to last, was of a kind to lift him above

¹ Hermann Grimm: Vorlesungen über Göthe.



all narrow limits. He was taught especially to admire Italy. Going from the station at Frankfort, it is but a short walk to the old house in the Hirsch-graben, the memorial stone in whose front tells the stranger that it is the place of Göthe's birth. Though quite different from the fashion of our time, it has a look most solid and respectable, standing close upon the street, the upper stories projecting over the lower in a manner to suggest a beetling Olympian brow; the many windows looking upon the passing back and forth of the human tide, as if, like the child it gave to the world, it was, before all that moved about it, wide-awake and impressionable. In Göthe's famous autobiography, written in age, the great man reverts affectionately to his earliest childhood, painting with lingering and vivid touch his child-life here, the dimly recalled pranks of infancy, the first beginnings to which memory goes back, the quarrels with the neighbors' children, the mother's story-telling, the pageants in the street, the first love. Read once the old poet's bright reminiscences, and you will long to see the house in the Hirsch-graben, and Frankfort's quaint streets and squares.

Göthe was a precocious boy. Before he was eight years old he wrote German, French, Italian, Latin, and Greek; many of his boyish exercises are still preserved. He early became the favorite of eminent artists, and tried ardently to become a painter. Perhaps the genius of no human being has come so near being universal, but it had its limitations, and this was one direction where they made themselves

felt. As regards music too, though he faithfully tried, his accomplishments were but slender; nor could he at this time, or later in his career, do much with mathematics, — more, no doubt, through defect of inclination than power. In other directions his energy and success were extraordinary. He tells us himself minutely the circumstances that aided his development; his father's training, faithful but unsympathetic, his mother's cherishing, and a thousand other influences. A French army — it is during the Seven Years' War — occupies the city, and his father's house becomes the headquarters of officers of rank. These treat the boy kindly, and, during the time of their stay, surround him with a French atmosphere. He is impressible to an extraordinary degree, — “like a chameleon, taking a hue from every object under which it lies.”¹ He learns not only the language, but acquires a French culture, which, however, is far from absorbing him. He studies English and Hebrew as well, and in spite of all this occupation, by no means neglects his body, which he perfects by abundant exercise. Precocious in everything, at fifteen comes a love affair, the first of a long series running through his life almost to his eightieth year.

At sixteen it is felt that the boy needs the influence of a broader world, and he is therefore sent to Leipsic. It was his father's wish that he should be a lawyer, but he soon turned in disgust from study of that kind, working in directions


¹ Lewes' *Life of Göthe*.

which seemed unpromising enough to his father and the professors to whom he had been committed. He became interested in medicine and botany. He read Molière and Corneille, and gave the rein to his theatrical taste. We find him performing in private theatricals, appearing as Tellheim, in "Minna von Barnhelm;" he even wrote dramas of his own, two of which are included in his works, — the firstlings of his genius. At this time he was profoundly moved by the "Laokoon" of Lessing. He visited Dresden to see the great pictures of the gallery, pursued faithfully his drawing, and began also to learn engraving. His intercourse with society made him conscious of awkwardness. Moreover, there are indications enough that he saw a wild side of life; but dissipation could not absorb him. With soul as sensitive as an iodized plate, his life at Leipsic does not pass without the reception of an impress from the figures of the maidens with whom he moves in society. After a two or three years' sojourn he returns to Frankfort, really vastly developed by experience and culture; though not unnaturally, his father considers that he has begun his career most unpromisingly. The relations of the two become cold and unpleasant, and the son falling sick, his time passes drearily. When he is once more able to work, he turns his attention to alchemy, reading books of old magicians, which in those days, when as yet there was no science of chemistry, still had authority. Still another love affair, — ardent and transitory as those that had preceded. At length, in 1770, when twenty years

old, he is sent to make trial of the university at Strassburg, as before at Leipsic. "A more magnificent youth never perhaps entered the Strassburg gates. Long before he was celebrated, he was likened to an Apollo. The features were large and liberally cut, as in the fine, sweeping lines of Greek art. The brow lofty and massive, from beneath which shone large, lustrous, brown eyes of marvellous beauty, their pupils being of almost unexampled size. The slightly aquiline nose was large and finely cut; the mouth full, with a short arched lip, very expressive; the chin and jaw boldly proportioned, and the head resting on a fine, muscular neck. In stature he was rather above the middle size; although not really tall, he had the aspect of a tall man, and is usually so described, because his presence was so imposing. His frame was strong and muscular, yet sensitive; he excelled in all active sports."¹

At Strassburg he was still the chameleon,—singularly receptive of every impression. Falling into the society of students of medicine, he at once catches their interest; electricity and optics also attract him. His intellectual activity was, as always, extraordinary, and yet he found time for much contact with life, where his course was often sufficiently unconventional, though it would be harsh to call it vicious. His force of character is in many ways apparent. To conquer undue sensitiveness, he compels himself to endure the dissecting-room; to sub-

¹ Lewes.



due a tendency to giddiness, he stands for long intervals upon the narrow space at the summit of the Strassburg spire. Marie Antoinette passes through the town, a lovely bride of fifteen, on her way to her career of calamity as queen of France. Strassburg receives her with much pomp, for there she first sets foot upon the soil she is to rule. But among the rich hangings of her apartment is tapestry chosen with bad taste, representing classic heroines sadly famous through unhappy marriages. The handsome young Göthe, regarding it as ominous, storms against the inappropriateness in a way to attract much attention; as if he foresaw the blood and terror in which the life of the princess was at last to go down. He rode and fenced; he made himself accomplished in dancing; and in connection with this had a curious experience with the pretty daughters of the dancing-master, finely told in his old age in the autobiography, for which I long to make room, but must deny myself.

The principal love idyl, however, of the Strassburg life is the story of his connection with Fredrika,—among Göthe's innumerable affairs of the heart, perhaps the most charming. Still, from the high platform of the minster, eighteen miles away in the beautiful Alsatian landscape, may be seen the spire of Sesenheim, of which the father of Fredrika was pastor. She was a girl of sixteen, every way lovely, whom Göthe met during an excursion from the city with a fellow-student. The story is too long to tell. The passion of the young poet was intense, and as warmly returned; but, as was again

and again the case with him, it subsided, enriching his experience, coloring magnificently the work which he afterward gave to the world, though so transitory. Frederika had a dangerous sickness after Göthe's desertion. She was the first girl whose heart he broke, and to have broken the heart of such a girl—say even his enthusiastic defenders—was an inhumanity, although we can pardon him much.¹ The pastor's daughter lived forward, patient in her maidenhood, sought again and again, but ever after unapproachable. "The soul which has once loved Göthe," she was accustomed to say, "can love no one else." The youth who crossed her path only to bring her torture, bestowed upon her, as we shall hereafter see, such an immortality as has fallen to the lot of few among the daughters of men.

Of the year or so that Göthe spent at Strassburg, there are three influences under which he came that are reckoned as important. The idyl of which Frederika is heroine is one; the second is that exercised upon him by the great Herder, the first man whom Göthe had ever met whom he could call master. Herder was a few years Göthe's senior, and came to Strassburg during Göthe's student life, hoping to be cured of a disease of the eyes from which he suffered. In their intercourse Herder showed all his power, but was often characteristically overbearing and sarcastic; Göthe was amiable and tolerant. Herder liked Göthe, though he did

¹ Hermann Grimm.

not recognize his genius ; Göthe, on the other hand, was powerfully affected. Up to the interviews with Herder, it had been all uncertain whither the flood would pour itself. Was the sublime energy to be felt in the world of affairs, or books, — in art, science, or literature? For all, by turns, the many-sided youth had shown a preference. Henceforth, however, the path was determined. Göthe turned passionately to the study of the Bible, Homer, Ossian, above all Shakespeare, gathering in this way strength for the sublime leap that was to carry him to the summits.

The third influence under which Göthe came was that exercised upon him by the beauty of the cathedral. We cannot feel the sway of Herder's spirit, and for two generations the charm of Fredrika's presence has been hidden in the grave. The fascination of the cathedral, however, is a lasting possession, which only deepens as the years go by. In the same month of April, just one hundred years after Göthe entered the Strassburg gates, the course of my pilgrimage carried me thither. The old city, as has been seen, is perhaps the birthplace of German prose ; it cradled the art of printing ; the purest and noblest eloquence of the Middle Ages was heard within its squares and churches. In these associations there is plenty to thrill the heart ; but how deep grows the interest of the thoughtful traveller when he stands before the cathedral's amazing front, or is subdued by the glorified light of the interior, when he climbs up through the meshes of the petrified net-work to the lofty platform, or from a dis-

tance beholds upon the horizon the spectral spire, penetrated everywhere by the light, to think that he is beneath the sway of a power that wrought so upon the culture of Germany's greatest mind!

While Göthe had been maturing, in the thoughtful minds of Germany and France revolutionary influences were more and more felt. It was now the period known from the title of a play—in those days famous—as that of the “Storm and Stress.”¹ A war against the conventional, a liking for outlawry, a passion for the tempestuous, characterized the young writers who were giving tone to the period. Göthe was possessed with it to the full,—so wild in his manners that his friends called him the bear and the wolf. He rambled in the open air until he almost lived upon the road. He was perfect in the sword exercise, and at home on the back of a galloping horse; but he found for his stormy moods no such outlet as the exercise of skating. “He was never tired. All day long, and deep into the night, he was to be seen whirling along, and as the full moon rose above the clouds over the wide, nocturnal fields of ice, and the night wind rushed at his face, and the echo of his movements came with a ghostly sound upon his ear, he seemed to be of Ossian's world.”² Stand on the bridge of Frankfurt; there is the statue of Karl the Great, of which I have spoken, the ledges in the stream below thrusting themselves up, as they did a thousand

¹ Sturm und Drang.

² Lewes.

years ago, that they might be stepping-stones for his Franks, fording the broad Main on their way to conquest. You are almost in the shadow of the dark spire beneath which, during the ages, his imperial successors have assumed the purple. There is another sovereign figure that one may well think of here, — the king in the realm of German letters. The February day that I stood on the Frankfort bridge the Main was sheeted with ice, and reverberating to the thrust of the skaters as in the day when the young Göthe found in the sport a vent for his supreme vitality. How fine is this account by his mother: "There skated my son, like an arrow, among the groups. The wind had reddened his cheeks, and blown the powder out of his brown hair. When he saw my cloak of crimson and fur, which had a long train and was closed in front by golden clasps, he came toward our carriage and smiled coaxingly at me. I took it off; he put it on, threw the train over his arm, and away he went over the ice like a son of the gods. I clapped my hands for joy. Never shall I forget him as he darted out from under one arch of the bridge and in again under another, the wind carrying the train behind him as he flew."

He stood now on the threshold of his first great success. He had already written — though it was not given to the world until later — his play "Götz von Berlichingen," founding the piece upon the chronicle of the old robber-knight of that name, the representative of a class whose quarrels and lawless spirit threw their time into confusion. There are,

however, many picturesque traits in their story, and redeeming things peep through in the characters of some among them. Sir Walter Scott began his career as a writer by a translation of Götz, turning then his attention to the mediæval romance of his own land, to make immortal similar types. We can understand that in a "storm and stress" period such pieces would be full of attraction; but the world knew Göthe first in another way than as the author of Götz.

In the little town of Wetzlar, where his fate placed him for a brief period, the susceptible genius became attracted toward an amiable girl, Charlotte Buff, who lived in her father's household, taking care of her younger brothers and sisters. To know such a person was, for Göthe, at once to love, and Lotte took her place on the list — already becoming long — of his flames. She, however, was betrothed to another, a manly fellow, Kestner, of whose character we have ample means of judging through his letters. Göthe's relation to the two was a singular one. For Kestner his friendship was warm; for Lotte his love extreme. It was acknowledged and talked about with the utmost freedom among the three, during the months of Göthe's stay. At the same time there also lived at Wetzlar a young student whom Göthe had formerly known at Leipsig, who was also suffering through hopeless love for a woman already married. Göthe at length was forced to leave Wetzlar, and shortly after, the young student, in a fit of despair, shot himself. Göthe, who had already shown such strong impressibility,

was now to show that he possessed as well a power for expression such as no mortal has ever surpassed. He was a self-registering thermometer, and the fifty volumes he left at death are, to a large extent, the minute record of the transitions of the exquisitely sensitive globule, his soul, as it sank and rose in the heat and cooling of its passion, along the scale of possible movement. The record of the Wetzlar experience is a memorable one, — the famous “Sorrows of Werther.” Göthe wrote it in a few weeks, combining in a romance his own experience and that of his friend. The story details, with excessive elaboration, the passion of a youth for a woman betrothed to another, who at length shoots himself in despair. It will be referred to again. For the present it is enough to say that, in our age, the experience which led to the book and the pages themselves can hardly be treated seriously; for such sentimental extravagance the world has now nothing but ridicule. Göthe himself, long before the end of his career, regarded it as absurd. A hundred years ago, however, its appearance was one of the great events of the century. Nothing ever hit more precisely the taste of an age. It was read by high and low; it spread to foreign lands, even to the confines of the earth; it was the favorite of chambermaids; Napoleon took it with him to Egypt, and read it seven times. At one step the youth of twenty-five had become the favorite writer of Europe.

Scarcely had the curtain fallen for Göthe on the experience of Wetzlar when, Lotte being already forgotten, a new intimacy with a woman came to

pass, — Maximiliane, the wife of an Italian of Frankfort, and mother, afterwards, of the singular figure who appears with some prominence in connection with Göthe's later career, Bettine. Although the husband became very jealous, the intimacy seems to have been innocent, and was of a kind usual enough in those days, though now it would be looked on as reprehensible. It was fleeting, like the rest ; and in quick succession just after we find him involved in two other ardent flirtations, the most noticeable one, that with "Lili," — Anna Elizabeth Schöne-mann, — daughter of a Frankfort banker, for whom Göthe told Eckermann, the Boswell who recorded the poet's later conversations, he had felt a truer love than for any one else. Göthe needed only to feel that he had vanquished a heart in order to consider that the end was reached, and must be forsaken.¹ Betrothed in April, in May everything was over. Lili's friends opposed, Lili submitting, as Göthe thought, too easily. His passion was cooling, he spoke decidedly, and they separated without too many tears. She was a fresh, lively, open-hearted girl of sixteen, with nothing of Frederika's tenderness, or the sensitiveness of Lotte. Among the thousand graphic pictures of the autobiography, one of the most vivid is of Göthe standing in the street before the banker's house, in the evening. Through the window he sees Lili at the piano, in the midst of a party of friends, whom she entertains with a song written for her by the lover from whom she was just

¹ Hermann Grimm.

separated, "Why dost thou draw me irresistibly?"¹ That his just-abandoned bride entertained an indifferent company by singing his song vexed him, but held him fast at the same time. Her unbroken self-centredness exercised a mighty charm upon him, and he was obliged to summon the whole force of his character to prevent himself from going in. Göthe is now a mature man. The capricious love-making, of which there has already been so much mention, we can smile at and pardon in a callow youth; more sobriety, however, seems proper now, and in spite of the apologies of admirers, we cannot help reading impatiently, as one fickle attachment follows another, and feeling that the dignity of a character to which we would fain do reverence is much impaired. They cannot be passed over unnoticed, for his work, as has been said, was to a large extent a record of his emotions, of the changes between coolness and fever-heat, as his mercurial spirit sunk and rose. Of the passions just mentioned, as of the others, the careful reader of Göthe can find the record that corresponds. Charlotte, without change of name, becomes the heroine of "Werther;" from the love for Lili comes the charming little poem of "Erwin and Elmire;" Frederika becomes the Gretchen of "Faust."² But just here begins a friendship which was thoroughly manly, and was to have most important results. At Mainz he meets a youth of noble birth, a few years younger

¹ "Warum ziehst du mich unwiderstehlich?"

² Grimm.

than himself, who had come to feel for him a warm enthusiasm, — Karl August, duke of Weimar, who invites him to live henceforth at the capital of his state. After a tour in Switzerland, Göthe, at the age of twenty-six, accepts the invitation, going to Weimar for a sojourn of nearly sixty years, his whole remaining life, in relations creditable to his patron and himself.

Among the hundreds of states into which poor Germany was in the last century divided, Weimar occupied an intermediate place, not standing in the rank of the larger ones, — like Austria and Prussia, — nor yet among the most insignificant in extent and population, but nearer the latter than the former. The city itself contained seven thousand inhabitants; the outlying duchy was scarcely more than a respectable county, but because it became the home of Göthe it was more famous than many greater lands. At Göthe's coming, the city walls were standing, with battlement, portcullis, and all mediæval circumstance. The beautiful park which the visitor now finds was not then in existence; it owes its creation mainly indeed to Göthe, and is the most remarkable feature of Weimar. It begins southward from the palace, the land stretching miles away without a barrier, magnificent plain and slope, dotted with trees as fine. Upon one of its paths stands the "garden house," the residence of Göthe for years, and not far off the house of bark, of which he was the architect, in which the unconventional duke spent much of his time, throwing off restraint and appearing

as the child of nature. Karl August was by no means an ordinary figure. He was brusque and soldierly ; his tastes were homely, sometimes coarse ; he mingled freely with the people, putting on their dress and dancing with the peasant girls at the country festivals. He was a bold rider, sought excitement in wine, and was often wilful. With all his faults, he was in many ways an admirable character. His judgment of men and things was sound and keen ; his aims were really high. Only a remarkable character could have had the ambition he possessed to make his court intellectually illustrious. He invited thither the most famous minds of Germany, — Göthe, Schiller, Herder, Wieland, and others of note. At the university of Jena, only a few miles distant, which was under his patronage, were men hardly less famous, — Griesbach, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, the brothers Schlegel, the brothers Humboldt. Many of them he kept at his side in life-long intercourse and attachment. The relation between Göthe and Karl August was beautiful and manly. There was never an ignoble suspicion between them, and but one transitory quarrel. The poet stood at the side of the duke as a faithful mentor.

Still more interesting than the duke was his mother, the Duchess Amalie, who is described as the soul of the Weimar life. She was a niece of Frederick the Great, and had much of his power. She was left a widow with two sons before she was twenty, and at Göthe's coming was still young. Her features were full of expression ; in particular,

her eye had the same remarkable brightness to be seen in that of her uncle, whom she more and more resembled as her life advanced. She was well educated, and had agreeable social qualities. What was more remarkable, she had a manly firmness and sense in matters of business and government. As a regent, she managed with real ability the affairs of her state in the difficult time of the Seven Years' War. Like a little shallop caught in the midst of fighting men-of-war, the duchy lay in the very track of the great contending powers. Austria, Prussia, Saxony were right at hand, and Weimar lay precisely in the path of France. She managed all, however, with great spirit and skill. As to Göthe, she saw at once the wisdom of inviting him to Weimar, and it is perhaps right to say it was mainly through her that he remained.

In estimating the life of Göthe at Weimar, we must bear in mind the manners of the land and time, which permitted much that in better regulated modern society would be regarded as improper, — even sinful. He has been reproached with living as a courtier and dependent, and a contrast easily suggests itself between him and Lessing, who turned his back upon princes in such proud independence. To me, indeed, Göthe is far enough from seeming possessed of such moral grandeur of character as his great precursor, yet let us try to do him strict justice. To live from the proceeds of authorship was, in those days, impossible ; dependence upon a prince was not deemed unmanly, even by the proudest. The pure Schiller accepted the duke's

pension, and Lessing himself was at last an attaché of the court of Brunswick, though he took care to guard well his freedom. In return for his pension, which for long was only about one thousand dollars, Göthe rendered most ample service. He was always the adviser of his prince, and at length the president of his council. He was far enough from being the poet lost in dreams, or the retired author whom no one might disturb. His literary work was really a side occupation. He was busy constantly with matters of law and administration, patient even with the pettiest details. As first official of the dukedom, — which he soon became, — the discharge of the responsibilities of his great position seemed to his contemporaries the peculiar aim of his life. His design in going to Weimar was to devote his whole power to the service of the duke and his people; this he fulfilled, giving only hours of leisure to literary work.¹ To the end of his life he was busy with plans of public benefit, trying in many ways to alleviate the condition of the people.² He opened mines; we read of his instituting a fire department, and exposing himself in fighting a conflagration until his eye-brows became singed. He managed the finances, was constantly active for the higher culture of the people, and directed the affairs of war as well as of peace. With his extraordinary vigor, these public employments were far enough from absorbing him. He turned, unwearied, from

¹ Grimm.

² Schäfer: *Das Leben Göthes*.

them to literary production, and here too he was heartily supported by his noble patron. In his relations with the court he was not a sycophant; he spoke his mind freely, and his intercourse with the duke was interrupted once, at least, by a quarrel. The bond between them was that of hearty friendship, in which the frank duke often appears as much the dependant as Göthe himself.¹

Many pictures of the life at Weimar are given, often picturesque and charming, not always edifying. At his coming he fascinated all by his unconstrained ways and splendid talents. In conversation he startled with paradoxes; the next moment was waltzing round the room, with mad antics that made beholders roar with laughter. Wieland—who had been sharply satirized by Göthe, and saw himself superseded by him, not only in the world of Weimar, but in Germany at large—admired him with a generosity which does the highest credit to his character, and no tribute is more graceful than his. “How I loved the magnificent youth, as I sat beside him at table! Since that morning my soul is as full of Göthe as a dew-drop of the morning sun.” “I catch strange glimpses of him, now darting across the ice; now, with locks flowing over his shoulders, whirling around in a mad Bacchante waltz; finally, standing in the market-place with the duke, by the hour together, cracking huge sledge-whips for a wager.”² Here too is a

¹ Gödeke.

² Lewes.

story told by Gleim, a poet justly famous—if for nothing else—for spirited soldiers' songs during the Seven Years' War, and who protected and encouraged younger poets of his time, showing in his fostering more kindness of heart than discernment: "Soon after Göthe had written 'Werther,' I came to Weimar, and wished to know him. I had brought with me the last literary novelty, and read here and there a poem in the company in which I passed the evening. While I was reading, a young man, booted and spurred, in a short green shooting-jacket, thrown open, came in and mingled with the audience. I had scarcely remarked his entrance. He sat down opposite to me and listened attentively. I scarcely know what it was about him that particularly struck me, except a pair of brilliant, dark, Italian eyes. But it was decreed I should know more of him. During a short pause, in which some gentlemen and ladies were discussing the merits of the pieces I had read, the gallant young sportsman—for such I took him to be—rose from his chair, and, bowing with a most courteous and ingratiating air to me, offered to relieve me from time to time in reading, lest I should be tired. I could do no less than accept so polite an offer, and immediately handed him the book. But oh! Apollo, and all ye Muses, what was I then to hear. At first, indeed, things went on smoothly enough. All at once, however, it was as if some wild and wanton spirit had taken possession of the young reader, and I thought I saw the wild huntsman bodily before me. He read poems that had no existence in the book,

broke out into all possible moods and dialects. Hexameters, iambics, doggerel, one after another, or blended in strange confusion, came tumbling out in torrents. Amidst all came magnificent thoughts. He put everybody present out of countenance in one way or another. In a little fable composed extempore, in doggerel verses, he likened me, wittily enough, to a worthy and most enduring turkey-hen who sets on a great heap of eggs, of her own and other people, and hatches them with infinite patience, but to whom it happens sometimes to have a chalk egg put under her instead of a real one. 'That is either Göthe or the devil,' cried I to Wieland, who sat opposite me. 'Both,' he replied. 'He has the devil in him to-night, and at such times he is like a wanton colt that flings out before and behind, and you will do well not to go too near him.' "

One more anecdote of his wild time. He was fond of bathing, and often bathed at night. One evening, when the moon was calmly shining, a peasant, returning home, was crossing a bridge near by ; Göthe espied him, and, moved with the spirit of mischief which so often startled Weimar, uttered wild sepulchral tones, raised himself half out of water, ducked under, and reappeared, howling, to the horror of the frightened peasant, who, hearing such sounds issue from a figure with long, floating hair, fled as if a legion of demons were at hand.¹ To this day there remains an ineradicable belief in the existence of

¹ Lewes.

the water-sprite who howls among the waters of the Ilm.

These stories of the ebullitions of his early manhood are interesting as evidences of his joyous, abounding vitality. Karl August, who had associated the poet so closely to himself, was only nineteen years old, full of the exuberance of healthy youth. Göthe had not advanced so far toward maturity that he could not enter with the fullest zest into the escapades of his patron. The severe Klopstock, hearing of the wild life which went forward at Weimar, wrote Göthe a censorious letter,—the cause of a breach between the two, which was never fully healed. The fault-finding of the old poet seems to have been unreasonable. The gaiety was innocent, though perhaps sometimes over-rough. At any rate, soon came a sober time; but whether merry or sober, Göthe's restless mind was always at work, its production reflecting faithfully the mood of the hour. We have to regard him as one who, beyond all the sons of men, experienced delicate emotions, having at the same time the gift of uttering them in poetic outbursts. It would be idle, therefore, to tell the story of his life without recording the stirrings of his soul,—stirrings, as we have already seen, not always innocent or dignified, although the outcome to the world was so often a transcendent work of genius.

Among the fascinating women of the court of Weimar was Charlotte von Stein, wife of the master of the horse, a woman older than Göthe by some years, but of extraordinary fascinations, and fitted

by her genius to sympathize with Göthe in all his strivings. She touched his heart to its depths, this time in no transitory fashion, for his love lasted ten years, the sensitive globule in his breast meantime recording its elevation in outpourings full of all possible ardor. It was another world than ours. The men and women who moved in the society of Weimar treated with little respect many social conventionalities, and not infrequently infringed upon the moral law. Jean Paul even went so far as to say of Weimar, "Marriages count for nothing;" and one cannot read far in the recitals without coming upon evidences of a freedom of conduct quite at variance with modern notions of propriety.¹ Göthe's passion for Charlotte von Stein was the most important of which he was ever the subject, and has been variously judged. His latest German biographer² remarks that Göthe's passions, before his Weimar life, have all something in common. "He meets a simple, lovely girl; his heart needs a goddess; the whole fire of his own nature streams toward him from the glances of this girl, whose eyes, were they ever so beautiful, without Göthe himself would never have had this attractive power. Every time there is the same process. After a time of bloom comes a truce, then light *ennui*, then withering, then all is gone. In Charlotte von Stein, Göthe met, for the first time, a power that had its own fire. His letters to her are among the most beautiful and

¹ Rudolph Gottschall: *Der Musenhof zu Weimar*.

² H. Grimm.

touching memorials in all literature. There is abundant material for judging of their relation. It is not possible to characterize it otherwise than as a devoted friendship of the noblest sort. She was somewhat cool in temperament, and, from her youth up, accustomed to guard her conduct carefully. She had indeed never passionately loved her husband. He treats her, however, well; she becomes the mother of several children, and always stands in the best relation with him. Göthe becomes seized by the most passionate reverence for her, which extends itself, in a measure, to the whole family, — husband and children. He makes their interests his own, educates one son, and remains through life his venerated friend. This son becomes a sharp-sighted, energetic, not unimportant man. There was never any misunderstanding between Göthe and the husband, who often indeed is the messenger who carries the poet's letters; yet Von Stein's honor was never doubted. Throughout Göthe's whole life we find an impulse to confess. There is no relation of his whose symbolical presentment may not somewhere be found. There is nothing, however, to indicate that his relation with Charlotte von Stein was other than honorable. Göthe wrote to her an almost countless number of notes; these reflect the lightest movements of his heart; now and then occurs a poem; when he or she is absent from Weimar, the notes become letters or journals. In these letters Göthe's life goes on for ten years like a broad, unbroken melody. Trying to figure to ourselves the young girls whom Göthe

loved, they stand like finished pictures before our eyes, drawn by his artistic pen. We see Frederika like a water-color, Lotte like a pastel, Lili like a Watteau. Charlotte von Stein is differently rendered. In her the intellectual strongly appears. Göthe came to Weimar with an intolerable burden of recollections; he met a calm, self-contained woman, full of understanding. With her he gained quiet, her voice stilling the waves. 'O, thou wert, in former days, my sister or my wife,' was the first line of a song that she early inspired. She felt, as well as he, what under other circumstances might have been. Their affection became gradually that of brother and sister. All the beautiful points of Thuringia gain a new charm because he writes from them to her. To her he dictates and reads his new poems — fragmentary — as they appear. Meantime, political life was stormless. In this favoring atmosphere, with her sympathy slowly grew the greatest works of German literature, — 'Iphigenia,' 'Tasso,' 'Egmont,' and 'Wilhelm Meister.' Here, in a word, is his earlier relation to Charlotte von Stein: A young man steps into a connection with a married woman, which one might name a spiritual marriage, and out of which, had the husband not been there, a full marriage would certainly have come to pass."

It is quite difficult to form a clear idea of the relation between Göthe and Charlotte von Stein. The extract just quoted puts it in a very favorable light; it has sometimes been represented as highly immoral; again, the lady has been declared to be a

finished coquette, who pleased herself by attracting her brilliant admirer, only to repel him. Neither his standing at the court nor hers was affected by the intimacy, which, it is probably right to say, went no farther than the expression, on his part, of his love, and on hers of alternate encouragement and coldness. Though Grimm calls it a "devoted friendship of the noblest sort," to us the connection can hardly appear otherwise than strange and culpable. For ten years, however, it was a most important element of the life of Göthe; the thrills and throbings which it caused, gloriously transmuted, are imperishable masterpieces.

Meantime, the romantic life at Weimar went forward. In the morning there were boar-hunts in the forest, in the course of one of which the spear broke in Göthe's hand, and he nearly fell a victim to the tusks of the beast. The heart of the day was given to public affairs. Nothing of importance happened in Weimar without his knowledge or coöperation. He never neglected an opportunity, gave minute care even to unimportant business, and sought in every way the good of the land. In the afternoon came literary employments; often, in the evening, amateur theatricals.¹ For these a passion at this time prevailed throughout Europe, and nowhere was the company of actors so brilliant in rank and genius as in Weimar. The duke and duchess, Göthe and his fellow-poets, the lords and ladies of the court, all engaged. Göthe's person was mag-

¹ Schäfer.

nificent, and his voice corresponded. Jean Paul describes his reading as being "like deep-toned thunder, blended with whispering rain-drops." His muse for a time was somewhat silent, and it was feared he was dissipating his powers, but he was silently shaping his masterpieces,—"Iphigenia" and "Faust," "Egmont," "Tasso," and "Wilhelm Meister,"—all having touches that belong to this time. We shall do him injustice if we consider him a selfish, epicurean reveller. His official labor was always earnest; considerable portions of his income went in charity to *protégés*, whose relations with him were often touching, and to him highly honorable. All who knew him, it is said, loved him, as only amiable natures can be loved, whether his peers or his servants,—children, women, scholars, poets, princes. Even Herder, now preacher at Weimar, a man of high dignity and virtue, and not always cordial in his feelings toward Göthe, speaks of him with reverence, and this should go a great way toward mitigating any harsh judgment we may, with our different standards, be inclined to form. From the escapades of the "Storm and Stress" he gradually developed into a calmer maturity, in the transition accomplishing some of his grandest work.

As he approached middle life, and his character assumed a graver cast, he began to show power in a new direction. To the fame of the greatest of the poets of his day he added distinction in the fields of science. We have seen that as far back as his Strassburg life he had been interested in medicine.

The reading of Buffon afterwards impressed him deeply ; he became accomplished in botany, mineralogy, and anatomy. Coming forth from his absorption in official duties, court recreations, and literary work, he renewed at length his former studies, although his friends condemned them as a diversion of his powers from their proper sphere.

In what remains to be said of his great life I can employ no detail, interesting though it might be. He visited Italy, his taste gradually turning from the things of his fatherland, until he became filled with a love for the ancient world, in his later years appearing rather like a Greek of the classic days than like a Teuton. His admiration for the ancients became so intense that he looked with indifference upon mediæval art and literature. He once told a young Italian he thought "Dante's *Inferno*" abominable, the "*Purgatorio*" dubious, the "*Paradiso*" tiresome.¹ Many of his friendships were memorable, particularly that with Schiller, one of the most remarkable and fruitful relations of the kind the world has ever seen, — more marked in its effects upon Schiller, however, than Göthe. At first there was mutual repulsion ; but at length their souls became united, so that they lived and worked side by side at Weimar in the utmost harmony. Their reaction upon one another was most beneficial ; the genius of Schiller was, as we shall hereafter see, most powerfully stimulated ; Göthe was brought back from scientific pursuits — fields in which,

¹ Matthew Arnold : *Quarterly Review*.

though great, he was not supreme—to the path of poetry, in which he was sovereign.

Step by step he proceeded down the years, the glorious perspective of his triumphs lengthening ever behind him, friend after friend dropping from his side, until he stood beyond four-score, with eye undimmed, and natural force scarcely abated, like one among whose splendid gifts was immunity from decay and death. Even to the last he was subject to those strange passionate heats. When Charlotte von Stein was forsaken, an unknown Italian woman became his soul's queen, who in turn gave way to Christiane Vulpius, at length his wife, though not until after a cohabitation of many years. She was a girl of little education and low social position, whose connection with Göthe caused much scandal in Weimar,—less, it is necessary to say, because the relation was immoral than because the station and manners of Christiane gave offence to the critics. The enthusiastic Grimm says the best that can be said: “When he returned to Weimar from Italy, in 1788, he needed a wife. He wanted health, freshness, youth, devotion, united with plain reason, from whatever sphere of society it might come. He was not afraid, therefore, when, among low circles, a beautiful girl met him, possessed of all these qualities. The Frau von Stein was perhaps the first cause why Göthe, satiated on the finer sauces of life, his heart meantime hungering, now took a stout loaf of *schwarz-brod* under his arm, into which one could bite at pleasure, and from whence he hereafter cut his meals. From the first—the

one circumstance reckoned out, that no church ceremony took place — it was looked upon by Göthe as a marriage, and never otherwise. He very soon took Christiane, with her mother and sister, into his house, and lived with them as his legitimate family. The reproaches that were made referred to the social position of Christiane ; it was said too that her manners were vulgar. How must we stand toward this personality, who for almost thirty years was an inseparable appendage of Göthe, and influenced him in important ways? She is said to have been a cook, who later took to drinking, and who, to the last, prepared embarrassments for the poet. But why not, instead of repeating the current Weimar idea, rather hold to that which Göthe saw in Christiane? She was a girl whom he passionately loved, as he confessed to Herder ; one who, in his investigations of the metamorphoses of plants, was his listener and intimate, — mother of his son, on whom his whole heart hung. She was the woman who conducted his housekeeping, whom he missed when she was absent, and whose death brought him to despair. Nothing was ever said against her before she belonged to Göthe. His mother, from the first, called her her dear daughter, and received her well when he brought her to Frankfort. She never showed selfishness, or replied to the unfavorable criticisms of which she was the object. When, after the battle of Jena, the French plundered Weimar, she had the courage to go through the marauders to the French officers, and procure a safeguard for Göthe. So far as we know of her conduct, she al-

ways shows spirit, energy, and sense." With this view may be contrasted that of a recent French critic, Scherer, highly praised by Matthew Arnold, who declares: "Both moralist and man of the world must condemn the connection with Christiane, — a degrading relation with a girl of no education, whom he did not marry for eighteen years. It embarrassed all his friends. She punished him — as he deserved — by a turn for drink, inherited by their unfortunate son."¹

It may be believed that Göthe loved Christiane; but she was not the last. Late in life came the episodes of Minna Herzlieb and Marianne Willemer, and even when he was beyond seventy a certain Fräulein von Lewezow arouses an attachment of the intensest. Ever parallel with the inconstant movements of the nimble, mercurial spirit runs the record — poem upon poem, all aflame with glorious impress from the burning soul, as the cornelian is tinted from the rosy fires which touched it at its formation.

On the seventh of November, 1825, the fiftieth anniversary of his arrival in Weimar, the land did him honor in a jubilee. It had become famous in Europe as his home; in a hundred ways it had cause to be grateful to him as a benefactor. It was with perfect sincerity that the people sang eulogies in his honor, approached him with gifts and garlands, and made the evening memorable with the performance of his peerless "Iphigenia." Still he had not fin-

¹ *Etudes Critiques de Littérature*, par Edmond Scherer.

ished, but went on seven years longer, fruitful to the last, the concluding lines of "Faust" falling from beneath his hand even as it grew benumbed with slow-coming death.

Thackeray — a boy of nineteen, studying at Weimar — thus describes him in his ripeness: "The audience took place in a little antechamber of his private apartments, covered all round with antique casts and bas-reliefs. He was habited in a long, gray surtout, with a white neck-cloth, and a red ribbon in his button-hole. He kept his hands behind his back, just as in Rauch's statuette; his complexion was very bright, clear, and rosy; his eyes extraordinarily dark, piercing, and brilliant. I fancied Göthe must have been more handsome as an old man than even in the days of his youth. His voice was very rich and sweet." At length came the spring of 1832, bringing to him sickness. His thoughts began to wander. "See," he exclaimed, "the lovely woman's head, with black curls, in splendid colors, a dark background!" He talked too of long-dead friends, among them Schiller. The last words audible were "More light." The darkness deepened upon him until it became the shadow of death.

"On the morning after his death," writes Eckermann, "a deep longing seized me to see once more his form. His faithful servant Friedrich opened the room for me where he had been laid. Stretched on his back, he rested like one sleeping; a deep peace and fixedness ruled upon the features of the lofty, noble countenance; the mighty brow seemed yet to

entertain thoughts. I had a desire for a lock of his hair, but reverence prevented me from cutting it. The body lay naked, wrapped in a white cloth,—the breast powerful, broad, and arched, the arms and limbs muscular, the feet beautiful and of the purest form, and nowhere on the body a trace of emaciation. A perfect man lay, in great beauty, before me.”

I have briefly sketched Göthe's life; we have before us, at present, the great task of obtaining a clear idea of him as an author,—what it was he accomplished, and what was the quality of the accomplishment. Scarcely a field of literature can be mentioned in which he was not active. In prose and poetry alike he was great, but no doubt greatest in the last. His works form almost a literature in themselves, the complete edition being comprised in fifty-four volumes. It will be most convenient to consider first his prose. By that he first became known in Europe; in that he was not so thoroughly the master. We can ascend from this, showing the transcendent man finally upon the summits, with nothing above him but the stars.

Göthe's work in science was not performed until he had already achieved the highest literary reputation; nor is it quite appropriate to consider it in a work which professes to deal only with belles-lettres. It must, however, be touched upon, and can be most conveniently treated here. It seems hard to do otherwise than assign to Göthe a position

among the greatest scientific reputations. How intense his interest was in this direction a curious anecdote illustrates. In the year 1830, Göthe—eighty-one years old,—was absorbed in the scientific contest going on in Paris, between Cuvier and Geoffrey Saint Hilaire over the question of the unity of the animal kingdom. At the same time with the news of this academic contest the announcement of the July revolution had reached Weimar. A friend visited the old poet. “Well,” cried out Göthe, “what do you think of this great event? The eruption of the volcano has come; every thing is on fire; there is no longer a discussion with closed doors.” The visitor, thinking he penetrated the poet’s meaning, expressed himself about the fearful political event—the driving away of the royal family, and the massacres. It appeared, however, that of that the poet had had no thought, but was entirely absorbed by quite different things—the contest so important for science.¹

In the science of natural history Göthe introduced two ideas of infinite fruitfulness. The first was the conception that the differences in the anatomy of different animals are to be looked upon as variations from a common phase or type, induced by differences of habit, locality, or food. It was a generalization which he made from his discovery, in the human skeleton, of what is known as the intermaxillary bone. It had been a fact well known to osteologists that in most vertebrates the

¹ Rudolph Gottschall.

upper jaw consists of two bones, — the upper jawbone and the intermaxillary, or bone between the jaws. Of these bones it was supposed that in the human skull only one existed — the upper jawbone. Göthe, subjecting the skull to patient study, demonstrated the existence of sutures in the upper jawbone; reasoning therefrom that there was no departure from the universal type in man, showing that in the foetal skull, in place of sutures, there were distinct separations, and affirming that man had originally possessed an intermaxillary bone, which had coalesced with its neighbor. Never has a more splendid example been given of the value of imagination in scientific investigation than the procedure of Göthe upon this obscure hint.¹ To an ordinary mind, what more trifling than such a fact? But we presently find, in a treatise of Göthe, the magnificent generalization that lies at the bottom of comparative anatomy, namely, that all differences in the structure of animals must be looked upon as variations of a single primitive type, induced by the coalescence, the alteration, the increase, the diminution, or even the complete removal, of single parts of the structure. The thought was enunciated by Göthe with the utmost confidence and precision, and has been nowhere better expressed. The theory stands to-day almost unaltered. “The coördination of the whole,” he declares, “makes every creature to be what it is. Thus is every creature but a note of the great harmony, which must be

¹ Helmholtz: Göthe's wissenschaftliche Erforschungen.

studied in the whole, or else is nothing but a dead letter.”¹

The second leading conception which science owes to Göthe is that an analogy exists between the different parts of the same organic being, similar to that which exists between corresponding parts in different species. This is most striking in the vegetable kingdom. One day, while Göthe was looking at a fan-palm at Padua, in Italy, he was struck by the variety of changes of form shown in the leaves, from the simple ones near the root to the very complicated ones higher on the stem. Following out his thought, he discovered the transformation of the leaves into sepals, petals, stamens, nectaries, ovaries, and thus was led to the doctrine of the metamorphosis of plants, — that all parts of a plant, namely, are variations of one type, that of the leaf, — a view completely adopted into science, and enjoying the universal assent of botanists. But Göthe saw that morphology, the science of the forms of which things are made, had an application to the world of animals as well as vegetables. In some animal forms the composition of an individual out of several similar parts is very striking. In the articulata, the caterpillar consists of a number of perfectly similar segments. When the worm becomes the butterfly it furnishes the clear exemplification of the view which Göthe had adopted in the metamorphoses of plants, — the development, namely, of apparently very dissimilar forms from

¹ Quoted by Helmholtz.

parts originally alike. He showed that the same unity prevails in the higher kingdom of the vertebrates. Walking one day near the Jewish cemetery, at Venice, he picked up a broken sheep's skull, and the idea occurred to him that the skull in vertebrates consists of a series of very much altered vertebræ,—an idea which, when followed out, led to the theory that every single bone of the skeleton is either part of a vertebra, or the appendage to a vertebra.¹

Only the scientific student can fully appreciate what is wrapped up in conceptions which may be so briefly stated, but all versed in natural history will understand the immense importance of the detection of such types. We may read in Göthe the clearest announcement of certain general laws of organization which lie at the foundation of the development theory,—a theory which, whether adopted or not in its absolute form, must modify largely, henceforth, all scientific thinking, and is one of the remarkable discoveries of our time. “The labors of botanists and zoölogists,” says Helmholtz, “did little more than collect materials, until they learned to dispose of them in such a series that the laws of dependence and a generalized type could be elicited. Here the great mind of our poet found a field suited to it. His contemporaries all wandered without compass. He was enabled to introduce into science ideas of infinite fruitfulness.” Before dismissing Göthe's work in descriptive or organic science, it may be

¹ Helmholtz.

mentioned that Agassiz is said to have attributed to him an anticipation of his famous glacial theory.¹

In experimental science the place of Göthe is less honorable than in the department just considered. His theory of colors, in which he attempted to overthrow the authority of Newton, has not been sustained. It may be passed by without description. Although erroneous, Göthe clung to it with singular persistency, showing in his defence of it a bad temper, which was strange enough in one who ordinarily treated opposition with serene calmness. Though so valueless, he showed a peculiar attachment to it, which, however, is perhaps not without parallel in the lives of great men. "As to what I have done as a poet," said Göthe to Eckermann, "I take no pride in it whatever; excellent poets have lived at the same time with myself, more excellent poets have lived before me, and will come after me. But that in my century I am the only person who knows the truth in the difficult science of colors, of that I say I am not a little proud."

Turning now to the class of works the consideration of which more properly belongs here, in the case of many of them the briefest mention must suffice. The number and variety of them is very great, and all are dwarfed in importance before the poems to which must be given our main attention. In the record of his three Swiss journeys and his Italian journey we find considerations of nature, art, and

¹ Hermann Grimm.

man worthy of so great a spirit. Of his historical and biographical activity nothing is so interesting as the "Poetry and Truth," — his autobiography during his forming years, ending with his entrance upon the Weimar life. It was written in age, and in telling the stories of his childhood the old man is often garrulous; but it is the most graphic and picturesque detail possible of a splendid development.

The consideration of Göthe's romances will afford a convenient transition from the prose to the poetry. The circumstances have already been detailed under which Göthe wrote his first romance, the "Sorrows of Werther." He was little beyond twenty years old, much under the influence of the "storm and stress" which belonged to his time of life and the fermenting age in which he lived. Deeply in love with Lotte, a girl betrothed to his friend Kestner, Göthe sees them given to each other and leaves Wetzlar, suffering from his passion. At the same time, in Wetzlar, a youth known to Göthe, wild through love to a woman already married, commits suicide. In the "Sorrows of Werther" the stories are combined, — the course of the hero is the experience of Göthe, the hero's fate at last that of the suicide. The circumstances are singular, almost repulsive. Throwing ourselves back, as well as we can, into the very different spirit of that time, in order to judge the work with candor, we must accord to it an excellent plan and a felicitous execution.¹ First, the character of Werther is explained;

¹ Kurz.

we learn him with all his peculiarities, — his love of nature, of poetry, of solitude, his disposition to gloom and enthusiasm. In his heart there is a void of which he himself knows not how to give account, but he is filled with dissatisfaction. While in this mood, he makes the acquaintance of Charlotte, in the midst of her younger brothers and sisters, engaged in the way which in later times has been so much laughed at, — of spreading for the children bread and butter.¹ He feels that she alone can fill the void, — that through her alone can his life attain aim and significance. The deep entrancement of upspringing love is developed in a fair picture with great psychological power; how it creeps into the heart of youth, growing daily until it becomes a wasting passion. Werther tries, not to fight it, but

¹ Thackeray's amusing lines will be remembered:

Werther had a love for Charlotte
Such as words could never utter;
Would you know how first he met her?
She was cutting bread and butter.

Charlotte was another's lady,
And a moral man was Werther;
And for all the wealth of Indies
Would do nothing for to hurt her.

So he sighed and pined and ogled,
And his passion boiled and bubbled,
Till he blew his silly brains out,
And no more by it was troubled.

Charlotte having seen his body
Borne before her on a shutter,
Like a well-conducted person
Went on cutting bread and butter.

to take away its nourishment, by leaving Charlotte. His spirit is so charmed that it is wounded by everything which touches it ungently ; and when, in the new relations he has sought, his feeling of honor is rudely injured, he has no longer strength to bear the insult. He feels that the hopelessness of his passion has robbed him of all manly power ; he therefore determines upon suicide, as one who has nothing more to expect of life. There is enough in the book which will seem to any modern reader absurd, but the story is wonderfully well told. The life-warm style presents the passion which seizes upon the heart of youth, in all times, with overpowering truth. Every expression is from the deep of a soul thrilled with love. All is perfectly clear ; nothing lost, as is so often the case with German writers, in the mist of indefinite sentiment which seeks an expression in unintelligibility. Remembering how greatly superior in the matter of style French writers in general are to German, we may understand the compliment paid to the " Sorrows of Werther " by a clever translator :¹ " The language of Göthe in ' Werther ' is as clear as Voltaire's. It can almost be translated word for word into correct French."

The first romance of Göthe was also his best. The famous " Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship " has indeed been very variously judged, and it is curious to set side by side the enthusiasm for it felt by Carlyle and Schiller, and the low estimate of the

¹ Leroux.

French writer, Scherer, and of Niebuhr, who calls it "a menagerie of tame animals." It advanced slowly to completion, with many interruptions, and in this way was injured. Like everything of Göthe's, it is a reflection of experience to a large extent. A careful seeker can find the originals of the characters in the writer's associates; and the wild Bohemian player-life that is given in such detail reproduces to a large extent Göthe's early days in Weimar.¹ It is greatly wanting in unity; there is little pretence of a coherent plan running through it from first to last; it is rather a series of detached scenes and episodes. Göthe once said, indeed, "A central plan is sought for it; I find that hard; I should think a rich manifold life which passes before our eyes would be something in itself, even without a declared aim."² What the poet wished to do, according to his own declaration, was to express his ideas upon matters of art and life, and, in connection, to show how a capable but weak man, through art and contact with life, can be educated to independence. But how imperfectly is this end carried out! The hero, at the end, is just as unstable, more so, than at first; only a plaything in the hands of others. In fact, if Göthe had any plan, he often changed it in the course of his elaboration, and to some extent seems, in this work, to have abandoned his peculiar skill in composition. The long episodes, though beautiful

¹ Grimm.

² Eckermann.

often in themselves, are not connected by any visible threads with the whole, as regards events or characters. But Göthe is still Göthe. With all its faults, "Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship" is full of genius. In spite of the incoherence, the development of characters is often masterly. The old harper, "Philine," above all "Mignon," are powerfully stamped individualities. Scattered here and there are fine bits of literary criticism, best among them the famous critique of "Hamlet." Deep views are expressed with regard to matters of art, politics, civil society. The philosophical importance of the book is high, but I find no fault with the judgment which pronounces it a complete failure as a poetic picture.¹ The "Wanderjahre," — "Years of Wandering," — written after the "Apprenticeship," is even less satisfactory than its predecessor. It is utterly without coherence, but has excellencies of the same kind, — a collection of heterogeneous scraps of wit, wisdom, and poetry, often brilliant and precious, particularly those relating to political philosophy, but as unconnected as kaleidoscopic fragments.

The "Elective Affinities," though from an artistic standpoint superior to "Wilhelm Meister," is quite inferior to "Werther," and in its subject, if not quite immoral, at any rate somewhat repulsive. It was written under the influence of Göthe's passion for Frau von Stein, his relation with her receiving here an "artistic glorification,"² although

¹ Kurz.

² H. Grimm.

it was another charmer, Minna Herzlieb, who sat for the heroine, "Ottilie." A modern reader will be most interested in its beautiful descriptions of nature, which justify the claim that has been made for Göthe, that he is the greatest of literary landscape painters. The "Fairy Stories" (Mährchen) possess no merits which are not seen to better advantage in the more extended works. The most famous is that of "The Serpent," which has been much praised for its deep sense. It must be said, however, that what sense it contains has never been satisfactorily reached, because every interpreter gives it a different explanation. It has served a bad purpose, with much else that Göthe has written, in leading to waste of time and brains in symbolical criticism, a point which will be touched upon again.

CHAPTER XIII.

GÖTHE, THE POET.

Göthe as a poet ! I do not know how to introduce my consideration better than by a sketch of a famous treatise of Schiller, entitled “ Upon Naive and Sentimental Poetry,”¹ in which he desired, as it were, to take account of the peculiarity of his own poetic talent in contrast with that of Göthe, and, side by side with the recognition which he paid the latter, to justify also his own way of writing. The poet, he says, can proceed in a twofold way ; he can, in his soul, embrace the world outside of himself *immediately*, quite unconscious of any idea within himself ; or, on the other hand, he can take some idea within his soul as a starting-point, and seek to blend this, by a second step, with the world of outside phenomena. The first way is that of the ancients, of whom we may consider Homer the typical poet ; wherefore Schiller calls that way of writing poetry the antique. He calls it naïve, or artless, because the poet, living in and with nature, creates his work, as it were, unconsciously. Still another name for this class of poets, and the most convenient, perhaps, is *objective* ; absorbed in the object contem-

¹ Ueber Naive und Sentimentale Dichtung.

plated, the subject — the contemplator — forgets itself and sinks out of sight. The second way is called *sentimental*, because the poet proceeds not immediately from the contemplation of nature, but from himself, as a starting-point, taking some sentiment or idea of his spirit. In a world which has to some extent forgotten nature and become artificial, — the modern world, — Schiller believed that poets of the second kind would be most likely to abound. He therefore calls this kind of poetry modern. Still another name for the second kind — the most convenient again — is *subjective*; because the idea gained from the soul, or subject contemplating, is first in the poet's elaboration. Though poets of the first kind — the naïve or objective — appear principally in antiquity, they can still appear in modern times. We may take Shakespeare to be such a poet. He "holds the mirror up to nature." The nature — the object — we perceive with perfect distinctness; but of the subject — the thing perceiving — we know nothing. Who knows what were Shakespeare's ideas? He produces for us the world, in abundant, wonderful presentation; he himself is a sphinx of whom no man can do more than guess. "Who can figure," says Carlyle, "what the man Shakespeare was, by the first, by the twentieth perusal of his works? He is a voice coming to us from the land of melody; his old brick dwelling-place, in the mere earthly burgh of Stratford-upon-Avon, offers us a most inexplicable enigma. And what is Homer in the *Iliad*? He is the witness; he has seen, and he reveals it; we hear and believe, but do

not behold *him*. Now compare with these two poets any other two, — not of equal genius, for there are none such, but of equal sincerity, — who wrote as earnestly as they. Take, for instance, Jean Paul and Byron. The good Richter begins to show himself in his broad, massive, kindly, quaint significance, before we have read many pages of even his slightest work; and to the last he paints himself much better than his subject. Byron may also be said to have painted nothing but himself, be his subject what it might.” * * * “As a test for the culture of the poet, in his poetical capacity, for his pretensions to mastery and completeness in his art, we cannot but reckon this (the power of objective presentment, while the subject is out of sight) among the surest. Tried by this, there is no writer of our time who approaches within many degrees of Göthe.”¹

I have found a consideration of Göthe’s poetic character which seems to me still more delicate and keen than that of Carlyle. The critic insists, like Carlyle, upon the objective quality of the genius of Göthe, but finds it subjective also. “In all his poems there is a vague, indefinite self, — reflecting a definite and clearly-outlined influence which impresses that self. His own mind is the sheet of water which reflects the image, and you see only that it stretches vaguely away beyond and beneath the image it is reflecting; but what catches the eye is the clear outline of the reflected object in the

¹ Essay on Göthe.

water. His imagination was passive and not active ; it reflected back with faithful minuteness the influence which produced the results. The best part of his poems is that in which external objects and social impulses are rendered again, but you always find the vague mental reflecting surface by which they are thus given back ; you always have both the deep, dim, Götheish mirror, and the finely outlined object which skims over it. The two never coalesce, as in Shakespeare.”¹ If we accept the emendation of Carlyle’s view, proposed in the passage just quoted, we shall still regard Göthe as in the main an objective poet, though less definitely so than the great bards with whom he is associated.

Of the second kind of poets, the subjective,—of whom Carlyle takes Jean Paul and Byron as types,—I believe we may hold Schiller himself to be a still nobler representative. It will be seen when he is treated more particularly, how, instead of beginning with the external, he proceeds from certain ideas in his soul ; we see how these ideas fill his soul ; how he pours them into his poems, his main design being to obtain expression for them, while the picturing of the object is a secondary matter. Schiller addresses Göthe in a noble stanza :

Both of us seek the truth ; thou outward in life, but I inward ;
I in the heart ; and so each shall the truth certainly find.
If the eye has health, in the outer ’twill meet the Creator.
If the heart is sound, it will meet the Creator within.

Göthe, as has been considered in the sketch of

¹ Richard Holt Hutton : *Essay on Göthe*.

his life, was the most impressible of men. Through eye and ear, and every sense, he took in the universe with a zest and thoroughness almost preter-human, making it his possession and becoming possessed by it, as the chameleon takes the hue of the object upon which it lies. His objectivity was the foundation of his poetic nature; the manifold phenomena of life he absorbed into himself, and formed them again artistically. "It was not my way as poet," he said, "to strive after the embodiment of something abstract. I received in my soul impressions of a sensible, living, lovely kind, and I had nothing more to do than make them plain to others. If I had any idea to present, I did it in a little poem." * * * "Whatever pleased, pained, or otherwise affected me, I changed into a picture, a poem, and so finished with it, partly to justify my ideas of outward things, partly to quiet myself within. All things, therefore, which I have written are fragments of a great confession."

From what has been said, it would seem to follow that Göthe would be especially great in emotional or lyric poetry. Here it is, indeed, — if we except one drama, — that he stands highest. "I have never affected anything," he said. "What I did not live, — what did not burn within me and make me create, — I have not practised and expressed. I have only written love poems when I loved." And so of other passions; they were only and always expressed as felt; therefore, in the great body of lyrics which Göthe has left, the variety is endless; each poem is peculiar and independent. There is

the highest completeness, the fullest naturalness. Whatever the sentiment may be in his songs, it appears with such certainty and truth we are hardly conscious of the dress of words; there is such mastery and wealth in the use of rhyme and rhythm that his songs have an imperishable charm.¹

In sketching Göthe's life, his strange susceptibility as regards women was noticed. With most men such susceptibility loses its power when youth has been fairly passed; but in the transcendent German it was as apparent when he was an octogenarian as when he was but twenty, and there was scarcely an intervening period when he was not the subject of a passion more or less intense. It was part of his strange impressibility. Plain men and women will call it an absurd weakness; but just as from some unsoundness in the mollusk the pearl is said to be secreted, so the poet's foible has resulted for us in something precious. How manifold and rich his love poems are is made plain by the writer whose work in this chapter, as in general, has been with me the *vade-mecum*.² In them are expressed all gradations of passion, from the cheerful and sportive beginnings to love most devouring, and the shadings intermediate between the extremes are all commemorated. Among the most remarkable of the lyrics are those known as the "Hymns," the "Elegies," and a collection made late in life called the "West-östliche Divan." In the "Hymns"

¹ Kurz.

² Kurz.

the tone is Greek ; in the "Elegies," Roman ; in the latter collection the influence of Oriental studies at that time undertaken is powerfully reflected. In those compositions Göthe follows in the path of Herder. How successful Herder was in reproducing the spirit of various ages and lands, while refraining from imitation, has been considered. It marks well the greatness of Göthe that here, where Herder was at his best, the unique man so far surpassed him. In the poems of the "West-östliche Divan" the inspiration comes from a certain charmer, Marianne Willemer, who is celebrated under the name of "Suleika." We might say that Göthe has evoked by magic to new life the Oriental element slumbering in the Teuton from primeval times. The poems do not make a foreign impression upon us, though written in the Oriental spirit. In his "Elegies," which flowed from no other source than his passion for his "loaf of schwarz-brod," Christiane Vulpius, Göthe reaches the highest artistic completeness. Each one of them is a masterpiece which cannot be surpassed ; in which plan and execution, thought and language, presentation and rhythm, the whole and every particular, are alike admirable ; in which the antique form blends felicitously with the modern life, the circumstances of the present receiving, as it were, a higher consecration, touched as they are by the breath of antiquity, while the essential peculiarity of the modern world is in no way disturbed.¹ When Göthe

¹ Kurz.

first met Christiane in Weimar, a girl in her finest bloom, his soul was full of Roman pictures. It is conjectured that she may have seemed to him to possess Roman characteristics, her portraits justifying such a supposition. "He surrounds her with all that adorned his life in Rome, in his recollection; makes her pour wine in a vineyard, he being the guest dearest to her; veils her figure with an Italian vapor, as he details their love experiences. Nothing written in modern times is so antique as the 'Elegies.' One would think Catullus, Tibullus, or Propertius by metempsychosis had reached Weimar, tuned his lyre anew, become intoxicated in the pleasure of these later days, carried the old accustomed wine to his lips, brought up again from the grave the primeval enjoyment of existence!"¹

In the "Hymns," again, Göthe rests upon a Greek antiquity; but here too with the same independence. The plain, earnest attitude; the simple yet exalted tone, in many rising into the impetuosity of the dithyramb; the vehement rhapsodies which have their name from a title of Bacchus; the antique measures which move on with perfect harmony, so that the rhyme is in no way missed,—all these characteristics remind us of the productions of the Greek lyric poets. And yet every thing is quite different. A thoroughly modern comprehension of the universe, and the whole fulness of Christian culture meet us.²

It is right, perhaps, to say that the expression "di-

¹ Grimm.

² Kurz.

dactic poetry"—teaching poetry—is a contradiction in terms. The best critics—Coleridge, for instance, in England; Lessing and Schiller, in Germany—hold that the proper function of poetry is to please, and it is contrasted with science, whose function is to teach. There are a few poems of Göthe which trench upon the didactic. His scientific treatises upon the metamorphosis of plants and animals he put into rhythmical form; but as didactic poetry is a perversion, so here his genius was not at his best. As a satirist, he composed a vast number of epigrams,—graphic, delicate, mocking,—for the most part couplets or quatrains, much inferior in interest to his great works, but enough of themselves to found a fine poetic fame. In this department of poetry his most noteworthy accomplishment was that brought to pass in connection with Schiller, the great collection of epigrams known as the "*Xenien*." At the end of the eighteenth century the literary public of Germany seemed likely to go astray after false leaders. A certain incorrectness of taste was becoming more and more apparent. Great poets were neglected, while mediocre productions were received with surprising favor. The name "*Xenien*" and the plan were taken from the Latin satirist, Martial. The undertaking was successful. The two poets combined their wit and knowledge; the poetasters and false guides smarted under the lash, and at last were largely driven from the field, leaving the scene for those more worthy.

In epic poetry—by which the Germans understand, not simply the exalted verse in which move he-

roes and demigods, but narrative poetry, the ballad, and even the idyl or pastoral — Göthe shows scarcely less variety and power than in the lyric. He is rarely below his standard ; all his attempts are models of their class. His ballads are among the best of the world. Following here again the example of Herder, in throwing himself into the spirit of past ages and distant regions, he creates pictures in the taste of the greatest poets of antiquity and foreign lands, as they only could have produced them had they lived in Göthe's time and belonged to his race. At one time we are with Shakespeare, at another with the mastersinger Hans Sachs, at still other times with Sophocles, Aristophanes, and Homer. In the "Achilleis" he even attempted a continuation of the Iliad ; the one canto which he completed remains a magnificent *torso*. The old mediæval poem "Reynard the Fox" he followed narrowly in his rendering, yet so transformed it as to give it the sense of an original work. He made it more artistic, more universal ; after a long oblivion, rehabilitated, it became again a possession of the people. In the lovely idyl of "Hermann and Dorothea," however, we find Göthe's epical masterpiece. The scene is the broad plain of the Rhine ; the time his own ; the hero a young villager, in whose simple manhood we behold nothing of heroic stature ; the heroine a buxom Teutonic maid, meeting with homely virtue and courage calamities in which war has involved her. For the rest, we have an inn-keeper and his wife, an apothecary, a village magistrate, a parson, — figures and circumstances homely

to the last. But the poem has all the sweetness of the landscape through which it moves ; the character-drawing is as fine as if sovereigns and demi-gods were under delineation. The humble obstacles in the way of Hermann's wooing, the self-assertion of the host, the foibles of the pill-vender, the simple wisdom of the parson, the confusion and sorrow of the exiles driven forth by war, — all are given with the patient detail of a Dutch painting, wearing the sweetest idyllic charm. And now let us see how the same versatile hand could outline the countenances of the Furies, sketch the unimpassioned features of the *Parcæ*, render even the sublime converse of the archangels, as they gather at the throne of God.

Already, in the labors of which an account has been given, it might seem as if work enough were comprised to fill a long, laborious life, yet nothing has been said about Göthe's work in a department where, if not at his greatest, he was at any rate a master of the highest rank, and is best known, — the drama. If fragments as well as completed plays are counted, Göthe is the author of more than fifty dramatic pieces. He began to write plays at nineteen, at first in the French taste ; but even before the appearance of the "Sorrows of Werther" he had composed "Götz von Berlichingen," although it was not at once published, — a work which, in one respect, he never surpassed. It was for those days a drama of a rare kind, being in subject, treatment, and language purely national. Götz, a robber-knight, an attractive representative of a class with which we have so many associations of barbarism, struggles

manfully in a bad cause, to maintain the rude order of things when, in the sixteenth century, the knell of feudalism had been rung, and it was time for a new world. Of poetry and plot we need say nothing, for the ripened man here far surpassed the achievement of the boy,¹ but as a piece of noble German it was never exceeded. Much as Lessing had done for a good prose, still what he had written was for scholars, not the people. Göthe was the first author of modern times to write really as the people talked; since Luther the language had not appeared in this living fulness and genuine German form. There were in it no foreign or learned terms, no twisted or pompous sentences; all was smooth and simple, yet various; it was first demonstrated in "Götz" that German was capable of presenting the richest inward and outward life.

We can only mention "Clavigo," only mention the grander "Tasso." The visitor to Brussels, who at the same time knows Göthe, will go first of all to the great square before the Hotel de Ville, in which, upon the spot on which he was beheaded, surrounded by the old Spanish buildings which witnessed his execution, the statue of the heroic Egmont rises, in ruff and cloak, girt with his sword as a knight. On the spot one can easily dream himself away into the past, until Alva's cruel troopers stand drawn up before the ancient buildings, and the cries of the despairing Clärchen resound outside in the

¹ A late English critic, Mr. Hutton, calls "Götz," far the most noble and powerful of Göthe's dramas, declaring that here he loses himself most in his characters.

narrow streets, as she tries to rally the citizens to the rescue of her doomed lover. But we cannot dwell upon Egmont. There is space to consider only that Parthenon of dramas, so purely exquisite in its Grecian finish, the "Iphigenia;" and the one which has made the most profound impression upon the world, the marvellous "Faust."

"Iphigenia" was elaborated several times. It was first written in prose and performed in Weimar, Göthe himself, then a superb man, at the height of physical strength and beauty, with a voice, as Jean Paul said, "now like deep-toned thunder, now like whispering rain-drops," rendering the principal male character, the fury-scourged Orestes. The next year it was recast in a metrical form, and several years after, during his stay in Italy, the poet used the intervals of his visit to give the drama its final shape. It met with a cold reception even from persons of refinement; Göthe relied proudly, however, upon his own judgment and taste. With the great world it has never become popular; the discerning, however, have fully accepted it, and it has contributed not a little to exalt in modern times the sense of the beautiful.

In "Iphigenia," Göthe—at that time full of admiration for the Greeks, full of admiration for Charlotte von Stein, whose traits are fixed for immortality in the heroine—took the legend which Euripides had already made the subject of a famous play.

Tantalus, king of Phrygia, having been admitted to the feasts of the gods, violates their con-

fidence by reciting what he hears ; he is consigned to tortures in Tartarus, and a curse is laid upon his line, which sins and suffers generation after generation. Agamemnon, king of Mycenæ, descendant of Tantalus, when about to offer as a sacrifice at Aulis his daughter Iphigenia, in obedience to the command of Diana, at the outset of the Trojan war, is thwarted by the relenting goddess, who substitutes a hart for the maid, removing her in a cloud to Tauris, where, though protected by Thoas, the Scythian king of the land, she tarries unwillingly, presiding over the fane of the deity. It has been customary in Tauris to sacrifice to Diana all strangers cast upon their shores, but Thoas, won to mildness through the love he has come to feel for Iphigenia, remits the harsh custom, wooing the maid to become his wife. Meantime, the siege of Troy having been accomplished, Agamemnon returns to Mycenæ, and is presently murdered by his unfaithful spouse, Clytemnestra, — the curse of the gods upon the race of Tantalus continuing in force. To avenge his father, Orestes, the son, slays his mother, and is straightway driven forth, tortured by furies. Accompanied by a faithful friend, Pylades, they visit an oracle of Apollo, and learn that Orestes shall be free from pursuit and restored to his country if he brings back from Tauris the *sister* who is kept there unwillingly.

Orestes, ignorant of Iphigenia's fate, interprets the oracle as referring to the sister of Apollo, Diana, whose image is retained in the Taurian fane, and undertakes with Pylades an expedition for its

recovery. At this point the drama of Göthe opens. Thoas, offended at the persistent refusal of his suit by Iphigenia, becomes stern, and commands her, as priestess of the fane, to sacrifice upon the altar of the goddess all strangers, according to the ancient custom. Orestes and Pylades, apprehended upon the shore, are delivered over to her for that purpose. Without disclosing her own secret, Iphigenia gains from them news of Greece,—of the return and murder of her father, Agamemnon, of the punishment of Clytemnestra,—learning, at length, that it is her brother Orestes whom she is doomed to slay. Induced by Pylades, she consents to deceive Thoas, and allow them to escape. She reveals herself at length as the long-lost daughter of Agamemnon, and passages of great tenderness take place between her and Orestes, who, while protected by the sacred grove of Diana, is free from the torture of the Furies. The friends urge Iphigenia to flee with them ; they find their companions in the ship, who, sheltered by a bay, have escaped the notice of the Taurians. The plan is to rob the shrine of Diana's image ; then, carrying it back to Apollo at Delphi, to dissolve the curse, and return with Iphigenia to Mycenæ. But the priestess, repenting of her deceit of Thoas, who has ever shown himself kind, delays. The Taurians approach ; the ship is discovered. Thoas, in wrath, interrogates the maid. Iphigenia rehearses the story of Orestes and herself, beseeching permission to depart with her brother in peace. The noble-minded Scythian relents. The descendants of Tantalus sail away

with their followers ; the image of Diana is left behind ; but now it is discovered that the *sister* mentioned in the oracle, who tarries unwillingly on the Taurian shore, can be interpreted to mean Iphigenia. The curse of the gods is at length dissolved, and they return in joy to Mycenæ.

It is a work of art in the highest sense, — beautiful in the particulars, beautiful in the proportion in which these are joined. With Greek naturalness the simplest means are employed to bring to pass the fine results. There were many difficulties in the subject. It is remote from modern sympathies ; it has often been considered ; Göthe had as a rival Euripides, whose “Iphigenia,” with many shortcomings, is still a masterpiece ; but Göthe was victorious. As regards the form, he has penetrated so deeply into the essence of Greek art that he made it his complete possession, and with free independence was able to invent and write poetry in its spirit ; so that, in conformity with Greek taste, he could lay out a plan, present characters, develop the action. Yet he was not an imitator ; he created, as it were, a new dramatic art, retaining from the Greek only its eternal part, every thing being cut away belonging to the peculiarities of the people and the age ; this he replaced in a way suitable to his own race and time. “Iphigenia,” though Greek and antique, is at the same time German and modern. Though faithfully rendering the subject in its essentials, he departed in respect to traits which were of significance only to the Greeks. Among the characters, Iphigenia is a beautiful

centre; on one side the Greeks, Orestes and Pylades; on the other the Scythians, Thoas and Arkas, in admirable proportion. Pure humanity finds in her a very beautiful expression, but she is not superhuman in her freedom from weakness. She is for a time won over by Pylades, who advises her to deceive Thoas, but soon she rises in her moral greatness; she determines to be true to her king, her benefactor; and just this truth which, according to all human foresight, would have led to their destruction and hers brings about a peaceful, happy solution. Though it was received coldly, Göthe was not misled as to the value of his work; he felt that with this he had reached the summit of lofty art. What wonder if the poet must stand there in loneliness! Finely says the scholar¹ whose criticism of the "Iphigenia" I have, in the foregoing consideration, closely followed: "It is a drama of to-day, and yet the poetic breath of antiquity sweeps through it, as if one of the greatest of the Grecian poets had survived to our times, continuously developing, and the entire beauty of Greek art, in its imperishable magic, had blended with the gain of thousands of years of advancing culture to a harmonious and living whole."

Here is the song of the Fates, recalled by Iphigenia, as she broods over the misfortune of which, as one of the accursed race of Tantalus, she must be the subject. He who remembers the solemn music of the rhythm with which, in the original,

¹ Kurz.

the unimpassioned Fates give themselves voice, will feel that any translation is a feeble reproduction :

Within my ears there sounds the ancient song, —
I had forgotten it and willingly, —
The Parcae's song, which they with horror sang
When Tantalus fell from his golden chair;
They suffered with their noble friend, and cruel
Their breasts became, and fearful was their song.
When I was young I heard it from my nurse, —
I and my brethren, — and I marked it well :

“The gods, O ye mortals,
I charge ye to fear!
They hold the dominion
In hands everlasting;
Their mighty sway wielding
As pleases themselves.

“Let him fear them twice o'er
Whom they have exalted.
On cliffs of the cloud-land
The seats are made ready
Around golden tables.

“If strife comes to pass then,
The guests are hurled headlong,
Contemned and dishonored,
To night-haunted caverns,
There vainly awaiting,
In deepest gloom fettered,
For ne'er coming justice.

“But they, ah! they tarry
In strongholds eternal,
Around their gold tables!
From mountain to mountain
They stride in their vastness.
From chasms infernal
Steam up to them sighings
From Titans there stifled,
Like scents sacrificial, —
A wavering vapor.

“The gods turn their glances,
Their eyes giving blessing,
From whole generations;
Refuse, in the grandchild,
The features to witness
Of fathers once cherished, —
The traits that still speak.”

So chanted the Parcæ;
The banished one listens,
In gloom-oppressed caverns,
The song comprehending;
He thinks of his children
And shaketh his head.¹

“Iphigenia” stands thoroughly finished, in all the perfection of an antique fane, in marble purity, in delicate proportion and grace. It remains for us to take up that vaster work of Göthe, which even transcends the earth, gathering into its compass the hosts of Heaven and shapes from Hell — the work left chaotic, apparently because the poet, having attempted to embrace in it the universe, found a mortal grasp too feeble; now lurid with sulphurous flames and resounding with the cries of tortured spirits; upon earth, passing from the carousings of vulgar revellers to the sanctity of the chamber of the sweetest and purest of virgins, from the blasphemies of despairing doubt to cathedral organ-music; again leading off into the blue spaces of the infinite, where tower the archangels, — the sublime “Faust.” Again we must go to Strassburg; the towering houses rising into the air from the fortifications, with the cathedral in its heart, — the “frozen music” which

¹ Iph., act iv, scene 5.

sounds not, and yet utters forever, with such rapture, while the centuries pass, the aspiration of its old-time builders. What associations the venerable city has we have seen. Is it right to say that it is chiefly interesting because here, in the brain of the young Göthe, the solemn "Faust" was conceived? The Germans of to-day can say, "It is the greatest work of the greatest poet of all races and times."¹ Its latest French critic² can declare the first part "a treasure of poetry, pathos, and highest wisdom, coming from a spirit inexhaustible, and keen as steel; containing, from first to last, not a false tone or weak line,—*perhaps* the most wonderful work of poetry of our century." To this view subscribes one of the greatest of English critics,³ "leaving out the *perhaps*." To such a height is it exalted by the suffrages of all civilized races!

In Strassburg it was conceived; for here it was that the old mediæval puppet-play, from which the poet received the hint, asserted its power over him, until, as he says, "It hummed and sounded in my soul constantly. I had, moreover, busied myself with all knowledge, and had early enough become convinced of its vanity. I had tried, too, all kinds of life, and always came back more unsatisfied and tormented." And again, when eighty-two,—five days before his death,—he declared that when he was first touched by the idea "the whole thing

¹ Grimm.

² Scherer.

³ Matthew Arnold.

rose before his fancy.”⁴ The first and second parts of “Faust” differ so much that one would hardly ascribe them to the same poet. The first part, with the exception of a few passages, is perfectly clear, representing the deepest results of human thinking and the most secret movements of the soul. In the second part every thing is mystically treated, and we move in the dark region of allegory. The first part is the masterpiece; the second far below it, yet containing passages of the highest beauty. The first part, it is said, was complete in its main scenes when Göthe was twenty-five years old, though it was not published in its present form until his old age. The mediæval play Göthe used as Shakespeare used his originals, developing it with the utmost independence, with divine hand transmuting the mere dust of the earth into something breathing and soul-warmed.

Faust, a man greatly cultivated, full of thirst after knowledge locked from the ken of mortals, is about to perish in the striving. Because no satisfaction is reached he becomes the prey of doubt, which is personified in Mephistopheles, the “spirit who denies.” To him he delivers himself, agreeing to resign to him his soul if any moment can bring to him such satisfaction that he shall wish to say, “Stay, thou art so fair.” He becomes a sensualist, and though he turns sickened from the coarse revelling in Auerbach’s cellar, he betrays the simple-hearted maid whom he wins to love him. We cannot

¹ Letter to W. von Humboldt.

call him precisely vicious, but he loses the inner power which might have kept him upright in the circumstances which form around him. He becomes the slayer of Margaret's brother, Valentine; he must fly, thus leaving Gretchen to her fate. It is due to him that she who already has destroyed her mother, and cannot meet her impending shame, kills also her child in mad despair, and must suffer death on the scaffold.

There is no need to tell the story more at length, the possession, as it is, of every memory. Even Shakespeare's flawless mirror never caught the world with accuracy more absolute. The accuracy is not disturbed by the weird appearing, from time to time, of shapes supernatural; symbols, as these are, of the doubt, of the passion, ennobling or degrading, which benumb or frenzy the human heart, and which, thus typified, become more real. When one has read "Faust," three figures — Faust, Mephistopheles, and Gretchen — remain henceforth unfading in the mind; all else is but background and accessory. The spirit has never felt deeply which can contemplate unmoved the figure of Faust as he is first presented. The scholar honored for his learning, the man beloved for his beneficence, so rich in gift and grace, and yet so disheartened before the unattainable that he puts to his lips poison! Touching are the voices of the cherubs, types of his childhood recollections, that recall him to his better self. For a moment the cloud on his spirit clears away; gathering again, after the transitory gleam, in shadow more intense. At first it was deep de-

pression, in which death seemed a relief; now it becomes despair, a universal doubt, a recklessness that is ready to purchase one blissful instant at the price of eternal torment,—yea, to desolate the world, if only one satisfying moment can be enjoyed. As Faust surrenders himself to the fiend, it is only pity that we feel. Every soul that knows its own deeps understands the tragical sacrifice, and is thrilled with sympathy. Then the upspringing within him of the sovereign among passions! It rages like the fiercest of fevers; mad with its incitements, he wraps himself and the girl he has come to love in the blackest destruction. At the end he staggers under a weight of remorse how appalling! storming upon the tempter with what rage of denunciation! We do not execrate him; we pity him. The strong, thoughtful, passionate man, who has passed onward through the inevitable mortal course of sin, suffering, doubt, repentance, beholds in the career of Faust a typical rendering of the tragedy of his own life, of power and truth almost superhuman.

Turning to Mephistopheles, there is no doubt that Göthe, in the case of this wonderful conception, as always, drew to some extent from the life. It comes upon us as something most grotesque, when the critic to whom in this chapter we refer so often¹ gives it as his opinion that at first the original for this prince among devils was no other than Göthe's venerated friend, that tower of virtue, Herder. He was the first, says the writer, who subordinated

¹ Grimm

Göthe. What makes Mephistopheles so great is that he knows every thing,—not only the evil but the good; that he unfolds to Faust the abysses of being, extends before him all intellectual and earthly joys. All that Herder did for Göthe. Mephistopheles, indeed, makes the revelation only as in mockery, to show that great and small, good and evil, are identical, and the whole monstrous sum a cipher. Herder did not go so far, of course. Other traits were taken from Merck, a man of keen intellect, who became afterwards Göthe's friend, and affected his development powerfully. Merck was a critic of the sharpest, but his criticism destroyed, nowhere constructed; he had no creative power, but was simply "a spirit that denied." He too was a man of most respectable position and character, paymaster in the principality of Hesse Darmstadt.¹ It is laughable to think of the chagrin these two men would feel—the pious and spotless head of the Weimar church, and the public official of unblemished reputation—if they could rise from their graves and learn that they were believed to be the originals after whom their brilliant friend had drawn the very prince of devils.

It is plausible that Göthe may have obtained a few hints from Herder and Merck, but the essential, dark lineaments of Mephistopheles, and the lurid atmosphere of Hell through which they are made to appear, had a different origin. It is the immemorial nightmare that haunts forever the human

¹ Gödeke.

spirit, caught at last in the brain of the most subtle and refined of the sons of men. Some such conception as that of Satan has been the most usual solution of the problem of evil. Before him who undertakes the study of the world's religious faiths pass a hundred uncouth phantoms from savage superstitions, together with the Ahriman, Typhon, Loki, Eblis, of more elevated beliefs. In the Christian world the conception of the devil appears in innumerable shapes, — in poems, in the creeds of different sects, in the thoughts of various ages and races, in the speculations of philosophers. Every mind, indeed, gives him a peculiar coloring, according to its bent and degree of development. To the ignorant peasant, or the wild proselyte from barbarism, he is a figure of the rudest. The Celt, baptized, but followed and haunted by shades from his forsaken creed, blends Druidic superstitions with the black spirit of his new faith. The converted Polynesian establishes some bloody phantom from his hideous traditions among his new ideas. In our own stock, an Oriental idea becomes amalgamated with the malignant sprites and giants of the Teutonic mythology. He flits from century to century, — now haunting the cell of the scared monk ; now fighting with the bold reformer ; now swooping upon the city in the thunder-storm, to be opposed by the peal of the cathedral bells ; now beheld from afar, in fancy, by the shivering peasant, hovering luridly amid witch-fires upon the Brocken peak. At length he is taken up by master minds. Milton celebrates his baleful glory at the head of innumer-

able shadowy minions. Then — darkest, subtlest, most terrible portrayal of all — stands forth the mocking spectre of Göthe!

The scenes in which Gretchen appears, from first to last, are among the most beautiful in poetry. The impression that she makes at once is of the most simple, artless sweetness. The genius of Göthe is never so manifest, perhaps, as in the portrayal of women. Gretchen was his first and last type, sketched at Strassburg in his impulsive youth, still occupying him when his hand grew palsied. From first to last she was unchanged. Without doubt Gretchen may be referred to Frederika.¹ Göthe was ill at ease on account of his treatment of her. Not the slightest indication has come down to show that the connection between Göthe and the beautiful Alsatian maid trenched upon the coarse or immoral. It cannot be supposed for a moment. He simply broke her heart by arousing in her the feeling that their relation was to be eternal, then one day saying, "Enough, farewell; free yourself as you can." His cruelty to Frederika he presents symbolically in the experience of Gretchen. Pure as a babe, innocently fresh and joyous, she is overshadowed in her quiet pathway by the gloomy pinions of her fate. No altar-fire kindled by the hands of vestals is purer than the love which is lighted within her soul; not guilty, but utterly overpowered, she is broken and falls. Where shall we parallel that climax of pathos as scene after scene

¹ Grimm.

unfolds itself! Her pretty archness at the first interview before the church, the childlike pleasure over the casket, the instinctive shrinking of her spirit, heavenly pure, from Mephistopheles, the plucking of the petals from the flower, her utter self-renunciation in the extremity of her love, the involuntary slaying of her mother, the whisperings of the evil spirit in her ear, interrupted by the chanting of the “*Dies Iræ*,” as she tries to pray in the cathedral, then at last the agony in the dungeon! One may read that scene scores of times, yet, if his heart is tender, never dare to approach it without a special fortifying of the eyelids. If a more moving portrayal of utter woe has ever been drawn, I know not where to find it. Poor, crazed Gretchen, tortured by conscience, yet innocent as at first, “whose only sin has been a good illusion,” in her frenzy beholding the flames of Hell roaring at the threshold, the phantom of her dead mother accusing her, the circumstances of the drowning of her babe rehearsing themselves in her thought, the execution that awaits her looming up in her fancy with all its gloomy belongings — the faces of the waiting crowd, the staff breaking as the signal, the gleam of the steel, — it is indeed a heart-break made audible! The relief, at length, from the solemn voices that sound from the air while no presence is visible, “She is judged — she is saved;” then the impression of utter, ineffaceable love given in one masterly touch! The sufferer is taken up among the angels, Faust claimed by Mephistopheles, the scene all vacant. Then the sounding

in of Margaret's despairing voice as she cries after her lover, even from the bliss into which she has ascended! No gesture, no presence, — only a despairing cry, the agonized utterance of a name. It is the pinnacle of Göthe's achievement; here he touched the stars, — not before, and not after.

When, in his eighty-second year, Göthe put the last touches to *Faust*, he felt himself its imperfection. "I have laid out too much work," he said; "strength at last fails." The second part is much inferior to the first, though one might hesitate to subscribe to the judgment that "the first part is the only one that counts."¹ As he grew old, although still of wonderful vitality, a certain decadence of his power became manifest in this way: he was betrayed into writing in riddles, enveloping his meaning in symbols and obscurities. Certain critics had insisted in interpreting symbolically what had been expressed with perfect plainness. He humored this disposition, and at last employed a symbolical form in good earnest. In particular did he do this in the second part of "*Faust*" and the "*Mährchen*," and much time and acuteness has been spent in trying to ascertain the meaning that lies beneath the dark language. Carlyle, indeed, when a young man, attempted to justify this way of writing, and proceeding upon his theory, turned presently to the composition of "*Sartor Resartus*," obscuring his meaning in a glare of fiery vapor, and so lending it impressiveness. Let the practice have such justification as

¹ Matthew Arnold.

it can, yet it is right to say we have reached a time when the authority of the pragmatic Scotch genius is no longer to be held absolute in literature any more than in matters of politics and social science. He, more than a half a century since, drew back the curtain which veiled from English eyes the great literature of Germany. The debt we owe him is immense, but many of his critical judgments we cannot to-day do otherwise than question. The passage quoted may contain a grain of truth, but this, too, is well said: "The poet who makes symbolism the substance and the purpose of his work has mistaken his vocation. The whole Greek drama has been interpreted into symbols by modern scholars. The *Iliad* has been so interpreted; Shakespeare's plays have been interpreted into modern platitudes." * * * "Indeed, symbolism being in its very nature arbitrary, the indication of a meaning not directly expressed, but arbitrarily thrust under the expression, there is no limit to the power of interpretation. It is quite certain that poets had not the meanings which their commentators find."¹ Over the second part of "*Faust*" the darkness is so deep that commentators never agree as to the truth concealed; so too of the story of "*The Snake*," and the second part of "*Wilhelm Meister*." "They are dead of a hypertrophy of reflection, a mere mass of symbols, hieroglyphics, sometimes even mystifications. What decadence, good heavens! and what a melancholy thing is old age!" So ex-

¹ Lewes.

claims Scherer, with the passion of his race for clearness. We may think he is somewhat excessive, but the clear-headed reader must be content if he finds now and then a beautiful fragment in the midst of confusion, without attempting to unravel plan or plot. For a spectacle of perfectly idle bickering and waste of ingenuity the comments of certain Hegelian critics may be referred to, who have occupied themselves with Göthe's darker writings.¹

Against the opinion of Carlyle may be set that of another critic, of weight hardly less: "All that Scherer says about the ruinousness to a poet of symbols, hieroglyphics, mystifications, is just. When Carlyle praises 'Helena' for being not a type of one thing, but a vague, fluctuating, fitful adumbration of many, he praises it for what is, in truth, its fatal defect. The 'Mährchen,' again, on which he heaps such praise, calling it 'one of the notablest performances produced for the last thousand years, a performance in such a style of grandeur and celestial brilliancy and life as the western imagination has not elsewhere reached,' the 'Mährchen,' woven throughout of symbol, hieroglyphic, mystification, is therefore a piece of solemn inanity, on which a man of Göthe's powers could never have wasted his time, but for his lot having been cast in a nation which has never lived."²

Göthe, then, as a poet could sometimes waste himself writing in riddles; as a prose writer he

¹ Specimens of their wrangling are given in the notes to Bayard Taylor's "Faust."

² Matthew Arnold.

could be prolix and tedious. What is it but to say, however, that, like Homer, he sometimes nodded ! Making every necessary deduction, what miracles of achievement ! It seems right to declare that no man more magnificently gifted has ever been born into the world. Here is a passage from Heine, its eloquence touched with a trace of heathen bitterness :

“The correspondence between personality and genius which one likes to see in extraordinary men existed wonderfully in Göthe. His presence was as remarkable as his utterance, — harmonious, cheerful, nobly symmetrical, — and one could study Greek art in him as in an antique. This body, full of dignity, never crooked itself in worm-like Christian humiliation ; the features of his face were not distorted by Christian self-crushing ; those eyes of his were not timid with any Christian sense of sin, — not devotional, or heaven-gazing, or tremulous. No, his eyes were quiet as those of a god. It is the mark of the gods that their gaze is firm, their eyes not darting this way and that in uncertainty. The eye of Göthe was as divine in his old age as in his youth. Time could cover his head with snow, but not bend it. He always bore it proud and high ; and when he spoke his form always dilated ; and when he stretched forth his hand, it was as if he could mark out with his finger the paths wherein the stars of heaven should wander. About his mouth a frigid stamp of egotism might have been noticed, but this trait belongs to the immortal gods, and most to the father of the gods, the great Jupiter, with whom I like to compare Göthe.

Verily, when I visited him in Weimar, and stood opposite to him, I looked involuntarily to one side to see whether I should not behold the eagle with the thunderbolts in his beak. I came near addressing him in Greek, but when I saw he understood German, I told him in German *that the plums on the road between Jena and Weimar tasted very good*. In so many long winter nights I had considered what sublime and profound things I would say to Göthe, if I ever saw him; and when I did see him, at last, I told him the plums of Saxony tasted very good! And Göthe smiled,—smiled with the same lips with which he had once kissed the lovely Leda, Europa, Danae, and so many other princesses, and and indeed common nymphs!”¹

A famous contemporary physiologist² declared that “never did he meet with a man in whom bodily and mental organization were so perfect as in Göthe. Not only was the prodigious strength of vitality remarkable in him, but equally so the perfect balance of functions. No function was predominant; all worked together for the continuance of a marvellous balance.” His power was wonderfully preserved from decay. The “octogenarian Jupiter” had in his massive and erect frame abundant life. He was still able to love and to attract love. Herder called his mind a universal mind. Among the sons of men there is no other such example of versatility combined with the highest excellence. Scherer,

¹ Ueber Deutschland.

² Hufeland.

whose admiration, as we have seen, is discriminating, declares that although he has not Shakespeare's power, his genius was more vast, more universal than Shakespeare's. As a man of action his career was a creditable one. As has been said, the world of Weimar knew him mainly as the minister of the sovereign, untiring in attention to even the smallest details. He directed with wisdom and benevolence, for a long series of years, the affairs of the little state, seeking in all directions the good of the land. "No case was ever known where, after his advice had been followed, things took a bad issue."¹

In the domain of intellect, think of the compass of his labors! He had, to be sure, his limitations. In art he could be neither great painter nor musician, though he faithfully tried. Pure mathematics was a field he left untouched; and in metaphysics, except that, like Lessing, he held Spinoza in the utmost honor, he showed indifference. In natural science, however, he stands with the highest. We cannot, indeed, ascribe to him the exclusive glory of the discoveries that have been mentioned. Columbus did not first find America; Bacon did not first teach the inductive philosophy; Luther did not begin the Reformation; we may find in preceding writings anticipations of the "Laokoon" of Lessing. So with the name of Göthe must the candid biographer mention others. But he belongs with the eminent founders of philosophic botany and comparative anatomy, in many a preg-

¹ Grimm.

nant sentence foreshadowing the great theories whose elaboration is the glory of the scientists of to-day. He was far before his time, and is placed by the latest writers¹ in a position coördinate with Darwin in England, and Lamarck in France, among the supreme leaders.

Turning to Göthe's literary activity, we may say it was fairly appalling. What he accomplished is in itself a literature of almost universal range. History, biography, criticism, letters, narrative, romance, drama, lyric, epic, idyl, epigram, — in prose and poetry there is scarcely a department unrepresented. Even his admirers confess, "he has written with a feebleness which it is to be hoped no German will emulate again;"² but again it is said, with probable truth, that every piece bears somewhere the stamp of his genius, and some are perfection. Such capacity for impression, such power of expression! "Poetry," he said, "is the urn wherein are contained for me the ashes of past sufferings." He might have said, as well, the wine of past joys; the universal human experience he caught unto himself, to store it in imperishable works.

Of Göthe's character what shall be said? A most difficult question to answer, steering his way, as one must, between extremes of eulogy on one hand and detraction on the other; looking carefully to ascertain what are the requirements of eternal

¹ Ernst Hæckel: "Schöpfungsgeschichte." Helmholtz.


² Lewes.

moral laws, and what merely the unstable prescriptions of human society,—one thing yesterday, something far different to-day. He has been called a completely *unmoral* genius who showed an impartial sympathy for good and evil alike,¹ whose writings invariably repel, at first, English readers with English ideas of life and duty. He has often been described as a heathen; took pleasure indeed in assuming that name, enthralled as he was by his admiration for the ancients. We are not to understand, however, that he was an atheist. The doctrines of a personal God and the immortality of the soul he held unswervingly, and often declared them. As regards his course in life, there is abundant evidence that his heart was tender; he had a helpful spirit, and his great activity was followed by abundant beneficent result. The conception of living for others, however, probably never occurred to him. He was kindly, but not self-devoting, and seldom interfered with his calm process of self-culture, for another.²

It must be admitted that what we call morality is to some extent a matter of convention, the conduct which it prescribes in one age or land dif-

¹ Shall we say that this is a characteristic of all great poets? "A true poet goes through the world like a child, who knows of no secrets, and even repeats the horrible with his innocent lips, without a feeling of what it means. With hands how pure does Shakespeare unfold the most terrible crimes before us! Göthe's poems contain the most sublime that has been said in the German tongue; but with antique cynic plainness he exposes, too, the opposite. Whatever stirs within him must be expressed."—Grimm.

² Hutton.



fering in others. To the Hindoo there can be no greater ethical shortcoming than the eating of interdicted flesh; to the Puritan theft is hardly a more definite dereliction than "Sabbath-breaking;" to the Pharisee the omission of the tithe of mint, anise, or cummin is more culpable than a breach of trust. But no one who respects human happiness and social order can believe that G \ddot{o} the was simply unconventional. A few such torches of passion as he, flaming up so readily and kindling such conflagration in others, and the world would be consumed. His passion uttered itself in sighs of exquisite harmony, whose music will never lose its charm; but think of the hearts that broke for him and gave no sound! He was a transcendent creature in body, mind, and soul; quite transcendental too in much of his course. With our ideas, in many of his relations we cannot think him innocent; and leaving out the question of moral guilt, such capricious heats and coolings cannot be reconciled with the noblest manly dignity, however leniently we may judge them in a youth

A grave charge, from which G \ddot{o} the cannot be easily cleared, is that he was disposed to play the sycophant before men of rank and power. In the battle of Jena the cause of his patron, Karl August, was overthrown, Weimar cruelly plundered by the French, and G \ddot{o} the himself exposed to insult; his life indeed was in danger, but he was saved by the courage and energy of Christiane. Summoned shortly after to attend upon Napoleon at Erfurt, he promptly proceeded thither, receiving with pleasure

the conqueror's attentions. At other times his respect for the mighty of the earth was carried to great excess. When visited by the king of Bavaria, a man of character far from admirable, and whom Heinrich Heine lashed as with a whip of scorpions in one of the bitterest of satires, Göthe felt his head go round with giddiness. "It is no light matter," he said, "to work out the powerful impression produced by the king's presence,—to assimilate it internally. It is difficult to keep one's balance and not lose one's head." Of a letter from the same personage he said: "I thank Heaven for it, as for a quite special favor."¹ These incidents cannot be considered exceptional; in many ways Göthe is simple and manly, but there is sometimes a singular apparent snobbishness. Matthew Arnold's defence of the poet is very amusing, but perhaps the best that can be made. "It is not snobbishness," he says, "but his German 'corporalism.' A disciplinable and much-disciplined people, with little humor, and without experience of a great national life, regards its official authorities in this devout and awe-struck way. To a German it seems profane and licentious to smile at his Dogberry. He takes him seriously and solemnly at his own valuation."

Can we say that Göthe was inspired with any great moral idea? In Luther's case the thought was to break the force of what he felt to be superstition, and he would have gone to the stake rather

¹ Eckermann.

than yield one hair's breadth. With Lessing it was the ardent pursuit of truth, and his life was one long martyrdom in its behalf. With Schiller it was passionate love for freedom, felt from first to last. Göthe cared little for the French revolution, which all lovers of liberty believed at first was so full of promise for man. Strange as it seems to us, he sometimes uttered himself as if he believed in the fragmentary Germany of his time as the best thing possible. "What has made this country great," he said, "but the culture which is spread through it in such a marvellous manner, and pervades equally all parts of the realm? And this culture, does it not emanate from the numerous courts which grant it support and patronage? Suppose we had had in Germany for centuries but two capitals, Vienna and Berlin, or but one? I should like to know how it would have fared with German civilization, or even with that general well-being which goes hand in hand with civilization?" And yet what did he do to sustain this order in which he seems to have believed, when it was threatened? During the campaign of Valmy he was present with the army at the request of his sovereign, but he employed his time in far-away studies, without enthusiasm for the cause at stake. Shortly after Jena he received complacently the homage of Napoleon, and while the cannon of Leipsic were thundering, wrote an epilogue for an actress. No great moral ideas inspired him here, or at other times, or in other directions. Can we say it was part of his transcendency? He moved among mor-

tals like one of the gods of the classic paganism he admired so much, noting the world's phenomena with a glance as keen as the very eagle of Jove. Like Jove himself, he found from time to time his Ios and Semeles, in whose arms he pleased himself with the thrills of an Olympian passion, and who often were so sadly consumed as he magnificently revealed himself. Of each throb that he felt it pleased him to make a record, as of all his sharp eyes beheld. But with it all there was a sort of supernal indifference to the world's ongoings, as if they were the concerns of a race with which he had little part; he might feel vivid curiosity, but need take no deep interest.

Can we feel such love and enthusiasm for him as for moral heroes like Luther, Lessing, and Schiller? I think not. He was a creature somewhat too supernal. Can we say that the fact that he was merely a wonderful witness, an eye to see, a tongue to report,—not a soul thrilled with great ideas, and teaching them to the world,—exalts him as a poet and artist? Yes. Such witnesses, at any rate, have been the singers whom the world places highest. Always hidden and unknown is the spirit of Shakespeare behind the magnificent tapestry which he holds extended, whereon are imprinted the perfect counterparts of men and women, as various, as individual, as many-colored. So too with Homer it is marvellous witnessing; so too with Göthe. He has been called an objective poet. The world impressed itself upon him with extraordinary power; these impressions he rendered again with power as

great. In particular is "Faust" a Shakespearian picture; the manly, the coarse, the satanic, the infamously pure, set side by side, the soul of the poet meantime withdrawn behind the veil. If art is the reproduction of nature, Göthe was the peerless artist. The type to whom we now proceed was rather teacher and preacher. He was *subjective*, starting from ideas within himself, for which he was thrilled with the noblest enthusiasm, the representation of the universe remaining secondary. Let us place Schiller now side by side with Göthe in the contrast in which they themselves felt that they stood. In this way we can learn to know them both.



CHAPTER XIV.

SCHILLER.

The effects of the Thirty Years' War have not yet disappeared from Germany. One hundred years ago, during the boyhood of Friedrich Schiller, they were much more plain. The land had not recovered from the depopulation which it had undergone ; the destroyed cities had not been rebuilt ; throughout the body politic a numbness, as it were, prevailed from the blows of the terrible scourge with which it had been beaten.

Schiller was born in 1759, at the village of Marbach in Wirtemberg, and the circumstances of his father's family and his own early life are all typical, reflecting the sadness of the time, which was to give way at length to something better. Poor Wirtemberg, depleted in every way by the Thirty Years' War, until no trace was left of the magnificent Swabia of the former time, which the Hohenstauffen had loved and ruled, had been given over to princes of ruthless selfishness. The father of Schiller was the dependent, almost the serf, of the reigning duke. He had been an officer of low grade, serving in the Netherlands and during the Seven Years' War. Schiller's mother was the daughter of a baker and innkeeper, and met her fate while Schiller's father

was stationed as a recruiting officer in her native village. The couple draw from us most cordial respect, as they proceed onward through the hardships of a lowly station. Besides Friedrich, their family consisted of three daughters; the parents lived on into old age, and were permitted at last to breathe the fragrance of the wreaths heaped by enthusiastic Europe about the feet of their gifted son. The father is prudent and devout, yet marked with a certain sternness, the echo in the home of the harshness in the world without. When the wars were done he was established as a forester at the duke's country-seat, gaining reputation gradually for skill in wood-craft; and it is a pleasant thing to read how, in his old age, the famous son takes his father's notes on tree-culture, finds a publisher for them, and introduces the veteran to the world under the prestige of his own name. The mother is in character all that is lovely, and full of poetic sensibility. As the boy Schiller comes forward, he is destined to be a minister, but when fourteen the duke offers him a place in a school which he has established to train youths for the public service. It shows the subjection of the people that the parents do not dare to refuse the offer, although they would have gladly done so, and the prospect was utterly repulsive to the boy himself. It seems to have been an irksome restraint into which he was put, through which five or six years later his impetuous spirit was forced to burst a way to emancipation.

The destination marked out for him now was that of army surgeon, and here is his portrait as a friend

of his drew it when at length he was qualified: "Crushed into the stiff, tasteless old Prussian uniform; on each of his temples three stiff rolls, as if done with gypsum; the tiny, cocked hat scarcely covering his crown; so much thicker the long pig-tail, with the slender neck crammed into a very narrow horse-hair stock; the feet put under the white spatterdashes, smirched by traces of shoe-blackening, giving to the legs a bigger diameter than the thighs, squeezed into their tight-fitting breeches, could boast of. Hardly or not at all able to bend his knees, the whole man moved like a stork."¹ Not more irksome upon the spirited boy of twenty-one was this absurd dress than the training which he had received was upon his soul. What wonder, then, that when that soul now uttered itself, it should have been such an outbreak of flame as when a conflagration makes a way for itself to the air! Such an outburst is "The Robbers." It was full of wild extravagance, but at the same time of splendor and truth. It was received in Germany enthusiastically, and the high-cravated youth who moved like a stork was at once a famous man. He fled from Stuttgart, liable to arrest, for he had been, as it were, sold into the service of the duke. At Mannheim, at a distance of 120 miles, he became poet of the theatre, but his position was not yet secure. While here he wrote two other plays, "Fiesco," and "Kabale und Liebe." The young man of twenty-three worked, let us hope, dressed now in

¹ Scharffenstein.

somewhat looser fashion, but in a dreary room in an outlying village, the November rain beating in through the paper that did duty for glass in the window, pinched with poverty, and in dread of being borne back to bondage. The new plays deepened the impression which "The Robbers" had produced. Fame, which had come with such promptness, was now followed by fortune, which had been tardier. The enlightened duke of Saxe Weimar, Karl August, honored him with a title; still other potentates with a pension. Danger of pursuit ceased. He moved with freedom from Mannheim to Leipsig, from Leipsig to Dresden, thence to Jena, thence to Weimar, where at length the end was to come. The stream that had at first been turbid and destructive, as it tore in "The Robbers," through the barriers, rapidly ran itself clear, flowing at length pure, deep, and quiet, but with no less force and majesty than at first. Schiller gives himself for a time to other studies. He writes his historical works, and touches metaphysics in a reading of Kant. He is now known and honored by the noblest of the land. He comes to Jena as professor of history, and very notably lives henceforth in close intimacy with Göthe, a friendship most honorable to both, rich in its effects upon the genius of both, going forward without break, without jealousy on either side, until severed by death.

Schiller's life was one of tireless industry. While at work upon dramas and prose writings he found time for his superb lyrics. At length, after ten years' interruption, he returns again to the kind of

composition for which he feels he is best fitted,—the drama. Now it is that, at forty years of age, when his power is at the highest, all his natural force unabated, but calmed and trained by experience of life and study, he opens his second dramatic period with “Wallenstein.” Sickness has overtaken him ; he has burned his candle at both ends, studying through the night, and busy through the day with some form of labor. He has married Charlotte von Lengenfeld, and has a happy home. Without respite come “Marie Stuart,” the “Maid of Orleans,” the “Bride of Messina,” and, at length, his most popular work, “Wilhelm Tell.” Perhaps we may say that never has there been in an author’s life a more symmetrical climax. From “The Robbers,” his first piece, to “Wilhelm Tell,” his last, it is an almost constantly ascending stair, each footing in a region more bright and pure than that below, without a downward turn. Happy the poet who can forever soar as he sings, nor feel that the pinion cripples or the sunward-gazing eye grows dim !

He was but forty-five, but the end had come. “May, 1805,” says the journal of an eye-witness, “Schiller, on awakening from sleep, asked to see his youngest child. The baby, Emilie, was brought. He turned his head around, took the little hand in his, and, with an inexpressible look of love and sorrow, gazed into the little face, then burst into bitter weeping, hid his face in the pillows, and made a sign to take the child away. Toward evening, he asked to see the sun once more. The curtain was opened ; with bright eyes and face he gazed into the beautiful

sunset." * * * "His wife was kneeling at his bedside ; he still pressed her offered hand. There now darted, as it were, an electrical spasm over all his countenance ; the head sank back, the profoundest repose transfigured his face. His sleep deepened and deepened till it changed into the sleep from which there is no awakening."¹ They buried him at night, between twelve and one. The heavens were overhung with clouds, but as the coffin was placed beside the grave the veil was rent asunder, and the moon threw her first rays upon the bier. They placed him in the grave, the moon retired, and a fierce tempest resounded through the night.

In modern times, it seems to me that Schiller can best stand as the representative German poet. No other is more thoroughly noble ; no other, I think, so characteristically German. The figure of Lessing is unmistakably an heroic one, but one regards it with a somewhat frigid admiration. He is moreover to be looked upon rather as the Moses that led his nation to the promised land, than as partaking himself of the splendor of the best time. Göthe we must always consider as the supreme figure of the great period, as he is the supreme intellectual figure of the world in these latter days ; but I believe we may say that the very limitations of Schiller, as compared with Göthe, make it more appropriate to select him as a typical poet of his race. In so far as Göthe was greater, he lifted himself

¹ From Carlyle's *Life of Schiller*.

into the region of the universal, standing for the world, and not a race of men. Schiller, less cosmic, is always the German, and mirrors the German soul. Where Schiller was strongest, as a dramatist, he was, if we except "Faust," Göthe's peer. Carlyle, the Diogenes of criticism, jeering and flouting the world from the rugged tub of his uncouth phrase,—so honest and so crabbed,—even Carlyle would hardly dare now to write what he wrote in his youth, fifty years ago: "'Faust' is but a careless effusion compared with 'Wallenstein.'" But the author of "Faust," Göthe himself, could say to Eckermann, of this same "Wallenstein:" "It is so great that there is nothing like it in existence." For nobility of soul Schiller is supreme, and his nobleness is of a German type. Göthe, for the questionable passages of his life, has found warm defenders who undertake to make all square with the highest standards; few have ever presumed to speak of Schiller as needing defenders; to prove his virtue would be like proving sunshine to be light. I know not what real blemish can be found in it; for no one would think of blaming the trace of undue vehemence to be found in his youth, and reflected in "The Robbers," any more than the snap of the elastic cord which has been stretched almost to the breaking-point.¹ Thorough integrity, candor, and fidelity seem to have been his from first to last, and these warmed by a glow which is peculiarly Teutonic. When he helps his old father out with his book, or sends his homely mother and sisters unswervingly the birthday-present, with affectionate greet-

¹ See Appendix, note B.

ings, in the midst of his greatness, or bursts into manly tears on his death-bed at the sight of his baby's face,—here, and always elsewhere, we see a beautiful sensibility—characteristically German, and the very rose in the garden of German virtue.

In his intellectual traits Schiller is even more thoroughly German than in his character: "A Frenchman, an Englishman, and a German," says a writer, "were commissioned once to give the world the benefit of their views on that interesting animal, the camel. Away went the Frenchman to the Jardin des Plantes, spent an hour there in rapid investigation, returned, and wrote a paper in which there was no phrase the Academy could blame, but also no phrase which added to the general knowledge. He was perfectly satisfied however, and said, "*Le voilà, le chameau!*" The Englishman packed up his tea-caddy and magazine of comforts, pitched his tent in the East, remained there two years studying the camel in its habits, and returned with a thick volume of facts, arranged without order, expounded without philosophy, but serving as valuable materials for all who came after him. The German, despising the frivolity of the Frenchman, and the unphilosophic matter-of-factness of the Englishman, retired to his study, there to evolve the idea of a camel from out of the depths of his moral consciousness."

The story represents amusingly the tendency of the Germans to idealism. Schiller certainly would have evolved the camel from the depths of his consciousness; certainly he was, intellectually, a good

representative of his race, — more so, I think, than Göthe, who was more Greek than German, or perhaps too universal to be assigned to any one type. The artist is he who seeks to reproduce nature ; he is excellent in proportion to the perfection of the image which he makes. Of the artist in these modern days the objective Göthe is the best type ; the subjective Schiller aspired after perfect artistic form in a less degree than his great friend. Poetry was his life task ; not because, like Göthe, he sought to reach in it an artistic result, but because he wanted to use it as a medium through which he might express his great ideas of human dignity and freedom. Art with him was a secondary matter, which he often sacrificed to what he felt to be greater. As Göthe was the artist, Schiller was a teacher and preacher. In Schiller the idealistic tendency was very marked, and at first he was not a close observer of life and nature. Göthe, by drawing landscapes in his youth, by his investigations in natural history, also by his excellent social advantages, enjoyed from an early period, had learned life and nature thoroughly. Schiller passed his youth in confinement, shut out from nature and men, of whom he could only learn from books, or as he evolved them from his own consciousness. Even in his later works, as Wilhelm von Humboldt says, he does not so much draw nature as produce it from his own soul. As an artist, however, he constantly improved ; he himself, in his later life, called the figures¹ which he

¹ Ungeheuer.

sketched in his first dramas monstrosities. His intercourse with Göthe, and study of Göthe and Homer, corrected his too great subjectivity, while at the same time his interest in his great inspiring ideas—human dignity and freedom—never diminished. His fancy was so creative, his judgment won such certainty, that at last he could create the most vivid pictures of outward nature,—even from the contemplation of phenomena subordinate and trifling, get a perfect sight of the sublimest. In the fine ballad of “The Diver” the detailed description of the ocean whirlpool is most impressive; Schiller is said to have derived it from observation of a mill-flume. Though he grew as an artist constantly greater, he never reached the mark of Göthe. The latter was like the sculptor who forms his statues carefully from living models, moulding, however, the particulars derived from them to the highest expression of bodily and spiritual beauty. Schiller, on the other hand, always proceeding from general ideas, striving to reach for them a corresponding form, was like a sculptor possessed by a thought in embodying which he neglects the study of actual living forms. As such a sculptor would produce often caricatures, just so the subjective poet. As has just been said, Schiller called the figures of his earliest dramas monstrosities; he did raise himself from the deformity more and more to truth and beauty, and did it by pushing back his subjectivity, or at least affording to the objective view its inalienable rights. While Göthe, however, became blended, as it were, with the world outside of himself, the

spirit of Schiller always asserted itself. "Even in the best of his characters," says a critic, "we rarely see individual beings with sharp, clear-cut features; he expresses himself and his world of ideas; he himself continually *shines through* in his creations. As it is purely impossible to meet the man Göthe in his poems, Schiller, on the other hand, meets us in his personality out of every line he has written, clear and life-warm. Hence it follows that he comes so near to us."¹ I think this finely said. The personality of Schiller was very noble, and it is an inspiring thing to meet it so constantly as we read him; but the fact that we do so meet it speaks his condemnation as an artist. Shakespeare never *shines through* in his characters. They pass before in a multitude,—the prince, the beggar—the maid, the harlot—the saint, the villain—the simpleton, the sage—the veteran, the babe,—all in the thousand-fold sharp contrast of life. Which is the master himself—the noble Brutus, who has met no man in life "but he was true to me," or the embittered Timon, who finds all men false; the trusty Kent, faithful through the deepest poverty and suffering, or Iago, the incarnate lie? Who can say? The master is unseen, holding before his unrevealed soul his infinitely-pictured veil. So the soul of Homer is all unrevealed. He is to us, as Carlyle says, but a voice,—the witness. "It is impossible," says the critic, "to read the man Göthe in his poems. He does not approach us in his personality." In this

¹ Kurz.

way Göthe approaches the highest greatness; he would be to us sphinx-like, like Shakespeare.¹

Taking up, now, the particular departments of literary work in which Schiller employed himself, we shall find a variety almost as great as that of Göthe. That he might have become a skilful writer of romances is indicated by the incomplete story of the "Ghost-seer." He accomplished more in history, but his labors in this field, though important, were transitory. He was full of the aspiration to set free and help upward humanity, and the historical subjects he chose always had to do with the struggle of humanity toward something higher. The first work he ever projected, before the composition of "The Robbers," was a history of the most remarkable rebellions and conspiracies of the middle and modern ages. The works which he did complete were the story of the "Revolt of the Netherlands," and the "Thirty Years' War." The books show no deep investigation, and have therefore sometimes been lightly prized. His discrimination was, however, excellent; what materials he had he used to good purpose. He wrote with enthusiasm, showed constant improvement, and might no doubt have become very great. One of the best of German historians has paid him this tribute: "Schiller made use of history to ennoble low views of life, to awaken a spirit of sacrifice for the sake of the greatest benefits of life,—freedom and religion,—to oppose a

¹ Kurz. For a criticism of this position, see Hutton's *Essay on Göthe*.

poetic way of consideration to the stiff and dry methods which had prevailed. What was valuable in this department was accessible only to the learned. History, the picture of life, was abandoned to those who quarrelled about dates and names,—to pedants who smothered it in prolixity, or lawyers who abused it in inferences. It was therefore a benefit that a great poetic mind should interweave genuine poetry into the story of German life, which had been made in the highest degree prosaic.”¹

Schiller had gifts which might have made him a speculative philosopher instead of a poet. The philosophical and poetical tendencies were at first about equally developed in him, and he was embarrassed between them. He says himself in a letter to Göthe: “The poet in my youth overcame me when I ought to have philosophized, and the philosophical spirit when I wanted to write poetry. Still it often happens to me that the imagination disturbs my abstractions, and the cold understanding my poetry.” He was strongly drawn to Kant, at that time just rising into fame, whose principles he applied to particular questions in a series of excellent treatises. He was also an admirable critic, often not sparing himself. “The fine arts have no other end than to delight,” was one of his *dicta*,—a judgment in which he combated the view that one of the fine arts, poetry, should teach and exhort, and so pronounced his own condemnation; for his own poetry was always full of lessons and ex-

¹ Schlosser.

hortations. He concluded his critical writings with the treatise, the most valuable of the series, to which allusion was made in the preceding chapter, "Upon Naïve and Sentimental Poetry." His letters are said by Göthe to belong to his best work; he was magnificent in conversation, and, had circumstances afforded him the opportunity, might have become a splendid popular orator.

We have now to consider Schiller in his proper field,—as a poet. In his lyrics the man himself constantly shines through; they are not such transcripts of impressions, from which personality has been removed, as we find in Göthe. His first lyrics are blamed as without poetic worth, having, to be sure, enough of passion and fancy, but extravagant and untruthful. Schiller himself afterward condemned them. They have now only a historical interest. But here, as everywhere, he constantly grew. If we wish to see him at his best in this department, we must study him in a series of pieces written in his full maturity, to which Germans give the name *cultur-historisch*,—an adjective difficult to translate. The pieces referred to are partly emotional, therefore lyric; partly descriptive, therefore in the German sense epic; partly designed to convey instruction and exhortation, therefore didactic. The pieces deserve some study, because they are thoroughly characteristic of Schiller; let us take, then, the two most prominent among them,—“The Walk” and the famous “Song of the Bell.” In the first, the poet walking forth beholds a varied landscape. He looks down now upon a lovely

plain, now upon a city with all its life, now upon peasant homes, now upon the bustle of a harbor. The descriptions are felicitous everywhere, and everywhere blended with them are theorizings, speculative and historical, regarding the progress of man from barbarism to civilization, then the decadence again to a state of savagery. The descriptions of the landscape interchange with the considerations of the development of humanity, and we have at the end a series of beautiful pictures intertwined with the story of progress from wild beginnings to refinement, then again the decadence to a state of nature.

It is a noble poem, but more charming is the peerless "Song of the Bell." This touches the heart far more nearly than "The Walk," for in the latter it is the course of man collectively that is traced, and the consideration becomes abstract; whereas in the "Song of the Bell" it is the going forward of the individual, through social and civil relations, through changes of joy and sorrow, from the cradle to the grave. Parallel with the unfolding of the picture proceeds the casting of the bell, and the announcement of the functions it is to fulfil when it swings at length in its tower. What graphic power in the presentment, now of sweet innocence, now of noble virtue, now of bliss, now of pain! The youth's upspringing love, the housewife's decorous thrift, the wholesome prosperity of the man; then the shadows and lurid glares that are thrown across the picture, — the mother's coffin in the home, the conflagration, the dreadful civil uproar! A current of

rhythm, ever varying, ever melodious, sweetly chiming, bears it all past us,—now in a quick ripple, now in sober calm, now in convulsive, tossing surges; and ever and anon is heard the voice of the master calling, and the tones of the bell,—now joyous, now mournful, now full of boding terror. It seems almost irreverent to touch “The Walk,” much more the “Song of the Bell,” with criticism. Yet if we are to judge them by rigid art rules, they are defective. It was Schiller’s own *dictum* that the function of the fine arts, and therefore of poetry, is to give pleasure. If it is made a channel for instruction, it is a perversion, and the perfect effect is in so far hindered. The didactic purpose of these poems is unmistakable. For pure art the subjective is too prominent in them; the poet plainly proceeds from the idea within himself; by that he is mastered and inspired, and he cares little more for the world outside than to obtain from it the help necessary to its effective expression. They are not a reproduction of life so much as a statement of the poet’s ideas about life. It is very noble, but it is not Göthe’s way, not Homer’s, not Shakespeare’s; so Schiller falls, as an artist, here short of the highest. He is however so noble as thinker, as instructor, as preacher, that one feels disposed to say, Perish the art, and let us have in preference the wise and kindling utterances of the teacher!

Schiller had plans for great epics, which remained unfulfilled. Descriptive pieces of a shorter kind, romances and ballads, he produced abundantly, and they are among the treasures of German literature.

We must pass them here without mention, reserving space to consider the dramas, where Schiller was greatest. As has been noticed, of his dramatic activity there were two periods, separated by an interval of more than ten years. The dramas of his youth—"The Robbers," "Fiesco," "Kabale und Liebe"—do not proceed from an effort, in the spirit of an artist, to represent practically the world and life, but from his irresistible impulse to give form and expression to the ideas which stormed upon him; to express his views upon political, civil, and moral circumstances; to protest against the crushing out of right and freedom. These dramas are brilliant through fulness, novelty, and nobleness of tone. The language, although violent and turgid, overfull of images, and often coarse, is yet of absorbing power and of truly tempestuous eloquence. The thing wanting to them is the essential thing in a drama,—that the action and characters should conform to life. In these dramas Schiller ventured with great boldness to uncover the pitiableness of the social and political Germany of his time, following the precedent already set by Lessing in "Emilia Galotti," only with more audacity. In his later life, as has been said, Schiller himself called the figures of the dramas monsters and caricatures.¹ Taking "The Robbers" as a type of them, we can easily understand what he means. All the characters want truth; they are not taken from life, but only creatures of fancy. The action too of the play is

¹ Kurz.

not true to life ; still the wild action corresponds to the personages, and these are consistently carried out ; there are no inner contradictions, though they may contradict reality. The idea which lay at the bottom of "The Robbers" had gone forth from his deepest soul ; it was his own self, and he gave his whole power to its presentment. The action, the characters, were to him the means which he sought to employ for a moral end. He had passed the fairest time of his youth in what was almost slavery, which not only claimed the conduct of his studies and of his behavior, but sought to fasten the roughest chains upon his soul. Against this slavery "The Robbers" was directed. It was an intense expression of his excited feeling, his injured manly dignity ; in his vehemence he forgot truth in characters and in actions. The German people in that day lay precisely in Schiller's circumstances. As he was bound within the strait-jacket of an oppressive school discipline, the people were bound within the yet more oppressive restrictions of the existing civil order, robbed of their outer as well as inner freedom. What thousands had already felt was expressed in "The Robbers" with great-hearted boldness. He dared to indicate that only a general insurrection can lead, under such circumstances, to the better. Karl Moor became a robber because only in this way could he fight the destructive social order and heal the wounds which it had made. But the higher moral feeling which was born and had grown with Schiller caused him also to recognize the eternal doctrine that the good cannot be reached

in the way of crime. Karl Moor had not merely fallen into strife with the social order, but also with morality, and therefore must perish. His revolt against social order does not seem blameworthy; he only considers himself liable to punishment because he has wanted to attack the course of Providence. In "The Robbers" the incurable defects of the social circumstances of Schiller's time are represented in the most glowing colors. The idea running through it, most vividly presented, can be thus expressed: "The social conditions are rotten to the core; they need a complete reformation, through which it will become possible to the individual to make available the talent God has given him, without in that way falling into discord with the social order."¹

"Kabale und Liebe" is a piece which perhaps especially among the works of Schiller should appeal to Americans, as it is, I believe, the only one in which he in any way touches upon the events of our history. I have found nothing in Schiller more moving than the account of the departure of the Hessians for their service under George III.,—nearly the whole of the healthy young manhood of the land, torn from bride and wife with club and sabre-thrust, taxed as cattle, and sent unconsulted to the confines of the earth. The dialogue is between a good-hearted mistress of the duke and an old chamberlain, who brings her from the potentate a present of jewels.

¹ Kurz.

“ *The Lady* (opens the casket and starts back terrified). Man! what does thy duke pay for these stones?

“ *Chamberlain* (with gloomy face). They cost him not a farthing.

“ *Lady*. What! art thou mad? ‘Nothing?’ and you look at me as if you would pierce me through. Do these stones, so immeasurably precious, cost nothing?

“ *Chamberlain*. Yesterday seven thousand children of the land were sent to America; they pay for everything.

“ *Lady*. Man, what is the matter with thee? I believe you are weeping.

“ *Chamberlain* (wipes his eyes, with a terrible voice, all his limbs trembling). Jewels like those there—I too have two sons among them.

“ *Lady*. But no one compelled?

“ *Chamberlain* (laughs fearfully). O God! No—only volunteers! Some forward fellows stepped out before the line and asked the colonel at what price a yoke the prince was selling men. But our most gracious master had all the regiments march out on the Parade place, and the impertinent fellows shot down. We heard the muskets ring, saw their brains spatter the pavement, and the whole army cried, “Hurrah for America!”

“ *Lady*. God! God! and I heard nothing—noticed nothing!

“ *Chamberlain*. Yes, gracious lady! How did you happen to be riding with our gracious master on the Bärenhatz just as they struck up the signal

for marching? You ought not to have lost the brilliant spectacle when the rolling drums announced to us that it was time, and here wailing orphans followed a living father, and there a mad mother ran to spit her sucking child on the bayonets; and how they hewed bride and bridegroom apart with sabrecuts, while we graybeards stood there in despair, and at last threw our crutches after the fellows! O, and in the midst of all the thundering drums that God might not hear us pray —

“*Lady.* Away with these stones,—they lighten the flames of hell into my heart. Calm thyself, poor old man. They will return—they will see their fatherland again.

“*Chamberlain.* Heaven knows! At the city gate they turned and cried, ‘God be with you, wives and children! Long live *our good father, the prince!* At the judgment-day we shall be there!’ ”¹

In “*Don Carlos*,” the last drama of Schiller’s first period, we may see a change preparing. It is indeed, like the dramas which precede it, a pure subjective picture, very definitely the expression of his own nature. What the different characters say is nothing else than what the poet thinks and feels. The effort however after a more artistic method may be already seen; the language, though often turgid and passionate, is yet more noble and natural than in the earlier pieces. As has been mentioned in the sketch of his life, after the composition of “*Don Carlos*,” Schiller wrote no play for ten years.

¹ *Kabale und Liebe*, act ii., scene 2.

Meantime, through historical and philosophical studies, he won a deeper insight into art, a better knowledge of men and life. He largely conquered his tendency toward the abstract. His acquaintance with Göthe was affecting him deeply. Turned by his influence, at length, to his proper field, he writes dramas henceforth, which, with one exception, are borrowed from history, and he prepares himself for them by thorough studies. Although he constantly approaches more nearly to an objective presentment, his characters always becoming more definite and individual, he did not give up his lofty ideas; they became more pure, calm, and rich through his study and experience. He learned, at length, how to penetrate and enliven his plays with them without destroying objective truth; so that with a high artistic worth the plays offer depth of thought, and, what is still higher, moral nobility, a sublimity of tone such as we meet in scarcely any other German poet. Thus he became in a marked way the educator of the German people, upon whose moral and political development he had the most decided and enduring influence.¹

Schiller opened his second dramatic period with the magnificent trilogy of "Wallenstein," his most elaborate production, upon which he worked for seven years. Artistically, it is imperfect, and he afterwards surpassed it. It is variously judged, but to my mind no plays of Schiller are so impressive. Taking for his hero the most powerful and pictur-

¹ Kurz.

esque figure of the Thirty Years' War, that time of terror is reproduced most vividly. The central personage subdues the soul of the reader with a spell such as the historic character exerted upon the men of his generation. The dark figures who form the group in whose centre he stands fascinate while they terrify; and among them are characters pure and lovely even among the creations of Schiller,—the fairest ideals of his noble soul.

Let us study the series of plays, "Wallenstein's Camp," the "Piccolomini," "Wallenstein's Death," more closely. It is in fact one long dramatic piece, broken into three for convenience of representation.

The circumstances of the hero's career will be recalled from a previous chapter. Wallenstein pushes a way for himself from obscurity to the pinnacle of power. Of unmatched military skill and ability in influencing men, he subdues Europe for his master, Ferdinand II. In his might he becomes dangerous; he is accused of treason at last, and murdered, with the connivance of the court.

The time of the drama is close upon the end of Wallenstein's career. The gigantic figure who is the centre of the whole is not at once presented to us. First, in the "Camp," we have the soldiers in the ranks. Troops in uniforms of all colors are swarming; Croats and Uhlans are cooking at fires; others throw dice on drum-heads. There are peasants who have been stripped of every thing, and have come to the soldiers to beg or steal, as it may happen. Women of the camp sell food and drink, and carry on rough flirtations with the men. Now it is

a wild carouse whose uproar is uppermost, then a quarrel, then a rude harangue. Representatives of the historic corps that make up the army one after another become spokesmen, — the dragoons of Butler, the jaegers of Holk, the light cavalry of Isolani, the cuirassiers of Pappenheim. Some are from Southern Belgium, Walloons; some Italians, Irish, Scotch, Swiss, North Germans, Bohemians; some from the extreme frontier toward the Turks. It appears from their conversation that they have changed from party to party, crossed and recrossed the continent in their campaigns, plundered and struggled in the wildest of forays and marches. What is it that binds the utterly heterogeneous mass together, who seem to have no link of sympathy, no common faith, tongue, or race? It is made to appear that it is the mysterious spell of Wallenstein alone, and we come to feel in many ways the strange supremacy he exercises. They are the offscourings of the earth, but most picturesque in their rascality, and the awe with which their leader has inspired them, as their lawless talk records it, has in it something of the sublime. "Not he it is," says the prologue to the first representation of the "Camp" at Weimar, "who will appear to-night upon the scene; but in the audacious squadrons whom his will mightily sways, whom his spirit ensouls, you shall encounter his shadow, until the muse dares to place the man himself before you in his living form." It is a towering, extraordinary personality, which, unseen, already oppresses us as a thing of grandeur. "I have seen them perform 'Wallenstein's Camp,'"

says Madame de Stael. "It seemed as if we were in the midst of an army. The impression it produces is so warlike that when it was performed on the stage in Berlin before the soldiers, who were about to depart for the army, shouts of enthusiasm were heard on every side."¹

When we pass from the ranks to the circle of the officers, with whom we find ourselves in the "Piccolomini," though the station is higher, the tone is as reckless as in the intercourse of the jaegers and musketeers. The chiefs are assembling with their troops and squadrons at Pilsen, in Bohemia, all names luridly famous, for the most part brave in the battle-field, and merciless in the foray and sack of cities. Only two are of a different type, Octavio and Max Piccolomini, father and son, to both of whom Wallenstein is represented as strongly bound, and who are trusted in the highest degree. Max, although but a youth, is a famous soldier; and when for the last time the bloody sabres had burned forth in the battle ardor on the brow of Pappenheim and he sank at Lützen, the cuirassiers chose Max at once to be their colonel in his place. Alone among the leaders he is not an historic figure; he is Schiller's own creation, into which he poured his conception of nobleness. He is the darling of the troopers, and also of his peers in rank, who speak enthusiastically of his deeds of prowess. Octavio is represented as astute and politic, secretly scheming to overthrow the designs of Wallenstein, not

¹ "L'Allemagne."

from hatred for him, but because he is loyal to the emperor. To avoid treason to the kaiser he commits treason toward his friend, and is the instrument through whom the duke's schemes are thwarted. Uncurbed as the leaders are, the power of Friedland is supreme over all except Octavio, and when an imperial councillor from the court at Vienna appears among them, he scarcely escapes violent treatment. Octavio Piccolomini alone shows him respect. Max meets him with coldness and reproaches, and in one passionate outburst hints escape which prove to his father that he loves Thekla, the daughter of Wallenstein.

And now at length, after the shadow which has been impending more and more heavily, the substance itself appears. The immediate prelude to the entrance of Wallenstein emphasizes that visionary side of his character which Schiller makes so prominent, and which has much to do with the fascination felt by the beholder. Seni, the astrologer, prepares the presence-chamber, muttering spells and ordering the furniture as the stars decree. The *baton* of command is brought in by a page, and the great doors at the rear are swung back. Ludwig Tieck has given an account of the impression made by an actor of genius who appeared in the part of Wallenstein at the first representation: "As he entered, it seemed to the spectators as if an invisible protecting power went with him; in every word the deep, proud man implied a superhuman mastery belonging to him alone. He spoke earnestly and truly only to himself; to all others he

condescended. One felt that he lived in a sublime illusion, and as often as he raised his voice in order to speak about the stars and their influence, a mysterious awe seized upon the auditors.”¹

It has been acutely said that in *Wallenstein* we see both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.² He is like *Hamlet* in his protracted hesitation before decision. Schiller represents him as still undetermined before a crime, the thought of committing which he has long entertained. At his entrance his soul is still halting. Shall he remain true to his allegiance to the emperor, or plunge into the treason which he has been meditating? His wife tells him of slights put upon her at Vienna; his sister urges him to revolt. While seated among his generals, the imperial councillor, in a speech full of dignity, rehearses the leader's past services, the wonderful array of battles, marches, conquests; then calls him to account for his present negligence. *Wallenstein* rises angrily; his subordinates are full of sullen mutiny, but the leader is *Hamlet* still. There are certain conspirators whose interest it is to push *Wallenstein* over the brink from which he has so long recoiled. Octavio they distrust; but when a suspicion of him is suggested to *Wallenstein*, the leader thrusts it aside with disdain.

Teachest thou
Me to know my followers? Sixteen times
I've marched in service with that old campaigner!
Besides, I've cast his horoscope, and know
We both are born beneath like constellations.³

¹ Quoted by Scherr. *Das Leben Schillers*.

² D. F. Strauss.

³ *Piccolomini*, act ii, scene 2.

The conspirators undertake to procure from the leaders a promise of unconditional submission to Wallenstein, accomplishing this end by means of a trick, while they are plunged in the revelry of a banquet. Max alone foils them, but they hope to secure him through his love for Thekla. And what is the portraiture of Thekla? The purest loveliness and heroism! From her earliest childhood she has been educated in a cloister, separated from her father, of whom she only knows as the rumor of his exploits has sounded into the quiet of her retirement. Just arrived at womanhood, she is sent for by him, and to Max is entrusted the charge, at the head of the Pappenheimers, of conducting her through the troubled country to her father's camp. She loves the paladin whom she thus encounters, and who also offers his love to her. At length, attired in the splendor befitting a princess, she appears before her father, who receives her with warm admiration. His love for her is great, but he means to make her the instrument of his ambition.

Lo! against fate I murmured
That it denied a son to me, who might be
Heir of my name and fortune in the future, —
In a proud line of princes might send forward
This life of mine, so soon to be extinguished.
To fate I did injustice. Here on this
Young head, so sweet with maiden bloom, I'll lay
My wreath of glory won in fields of warfare.
Not as for lost I'll count it, if some time
I twine it round her brow so beautiful,
Transformed into a regal decoration.¹

¹ Piccolomini, act ii, scene 8.

The conspirators plot to chain Max, through her, to her father's side. She sees that she is being used in some way for a purpose, precisely what she cannot divine. The scenes between the lovers are full of beauty, but she warns the unsuspecting Max to be on his guard. When alone, in sorrowful foreboding that nothing but misfortune lies before them, she sings the heart-breaking song which stands in German poetry with the cries of Margaret in "Faust," the masterpieces of pathos.

Not until Max hears it from his father has the thought occurred to him that Wallenstein could commit treason. He pronounces it utterly incredible. Octavio presses upon him with proofs, telling him at last that he had it from the duke's own lips that he meant to join the Swedes. Even now Max refuses to believe, and nothing marks his spotless nobleness more plainly than his outspoken aversion to his father's conduct, who maintains toward Friedland the mask of friendship while secretly hostile. Octavio claims that, for reasons of policy, the delusion must be maintained. Max will listen to no explanation, but bursts forth:

Oh, this state policy! How do I curse it!
You will, through your state policy, yet drive him
Into some step. Ah, yes; it may be
Because you *wish* the noble leader guilty,
Guilty ye'll *make* him.¹

He hurries forth, determined to learn the truth from Friedland himself.

¹ Piccolomini, act v, scene 3.

For a long time it is the Hamlet phase of Wallenstein that we see. He stands on the brink of the crime, but it is too great for him, as the duty laid upon Hamlet was too great. He still palters in suspense, observing the courses of the stars; and even when word comes that his trusted messenger, with papers proving his intercourse with the enemy, has been taken prisoner and is in the emperor's hands, he cannot persuade himself that it is too late to withdraw if he chooses. Already in the camp a Swedish colonel has appeared, commissioned to conclude with him the treason. With soldierly definiteness the Swede gives the conditions of the bargain, and at the sharp statement Wallenstein recoils. The conspirators surround him in anguish. Now it is that his sister, the countess, with taunts and arguments that recall Lady Macbeth, finally stings the vacillator into determination. He signs the compact with the Swede, and is henceforth prompt and bold.

Wallenstein entrusts to Octavio the charge of bringing to the camp from a distance the Spanish regiments, and when, immediately after, Max comes to him as he has threatened, in order to learn the truth, Friedland confirms all that Octavio has reported. The conspirators are aghast that Octavio has been sent away. Wallenstein tells them mysteriously why it is that he puts such trust in him.

In human life come sometimes moments when
Man to the world-soul nearer is than common,
And questions freely with his destiny;
And such an hour it was, when in the night

That passed before the bloody fight at Lützen,
Thoughtful, against a tree I leaning stood,
And looked forth o'er the plain. The soldiers' fires
Burned luridly within the wrapping mist.
The dull, far crash of arms, the sentry's cry
Monotonous, alone the stillness broke.
I yearned to know who was the truest
Of all the souls whom the great camp encompassed.
"Give me a sign, O fate," I prayed. "It shall be
He who next morning comes to meet me first,
Bringing along some token of affection."
Straightway I fell asleep, as thus I pondered,
And, in the spirit, into battle rushed.
Great was the press; a bullet killed my horse;
I sank, and over me indifferently
Passed horse and rider in the fearful charge.
Panting I lay, like unto some one dying,
Crushed into dust beneath the trampling hoofs.
Then seized me suddenly a helpful arm.
It was Octavio's. I sudden woke;
Lo, day had dawned; Octavio stood before me.
"My brother," said he, "do not ride to-day
The dapple, as you're wont, but rather mount
This surer steed which I have chosen for thee:
Do it in love to me; a dream has warned me."
It was that horse's swiftness that did snatch me
From the dragoons of Bannier, hard at hand.
My cousin rode the dapple on that day,
And horse and rider saw I never more.¹

"That was a chance," says Illo, one of the conspirators. Tieck, describing the performance of the great actor, from whose account I have already quoted, says of the rendering of this passage: "During the recitation, his powerful eye lost itself, as if it were pleased with wandering in the shadows of the invisible world. A weird smile triumphed

¹ Wallenstein's Death, act ii, scene 8.

at the infallibility of the dreams and forebodings. The words flowed mechanically almost, as if it were superfluous to say that the rider of the dapple must be lost; and hardly had Illo said the words, 'That was a chance,' than with the passage,

There is no chance;
And what to us seems blindest destiny,
Precisely that springs from the deepest sources,

the whole giant greatness of the star superstition rises. As if from immediate inspiration, he said,

'Tis signed and sealed that he is my good angel,
and concluded then, as if injured and disturbed,

And now no word more."

Octavio, though in power far below Wallenstein, is much superior to his fellow-generals. Before he departs on the mission which Friedland, in his blind trust, has given him, he wins his comrades artfully to his side, one after another. They easily are led to disregard their compact of unconditional submission; to them oaths and signatures are of little moment at best, and this was unfairly extorted. Most important of all, with bold adroitness he gains the Irish mercenary, the ruthless Buttler, contriving to excite his rage by revealing to him an injury committed upon him by the duke. Buttler enters with a devilish zeal into Octavio's plot, entreating to be left with his dragoons near Wallenstein, darkly saying:

By the living God,
Ye give him over to his evil angel!

Max too, in spite of Octavio's threats and commands, remains behind with the Pappenheimers.

While the ground is thus undermined beneath his feet, Wallenstein remains serenely ignorant. The leaders who have been so loud-voiced in their devotion, in fear before the danger of the treason or won by bribes, fall away from him. One by one, in the night and in silence, with treachery as dark as that of him whom they betray, a coil within the coil, they depart with their troops, the ranks not knowing the why and wherefore of the breathless tumult until they are far away. There are left behind the distracted Max, and the grim mercenary grown gray amid scenes of terror, to whom Wallenstein is delivered over as to an evil angel. The stars have as yet uttered no hint of danger, and the leader stands unsuspecting while the thunders are about to break upon him. Never has his pride towered so high. He learns now for the first time of the love of Thekla and Max. His cheek reddens with a haughty flush :

I love him, hold him worthy, but I pray,
What has that with my daughter's hand to do?
He is a subject, and my son-in-law
I will upon the *thrones* of Europe seek.
Crowned I will see her, or I will not live.

Even at this very moment come messengers with evil tidings.

"Was it your command that the Croats should go forth? All the villages around are empty."

"Did you despatch Deodat? He has gone without sign; so Götz, Maradas, Kolatto."

Close upon the heels of one messenger follows another, bolt upon bolt, until Wallenstein sinks as if stunned, his face in his hands.¹ Of the part Octavio has played, even he can no longer doubt; pathetically he apostrophizes his false friend, and recovering himself, towers more grandly in the misfortune. He steps forth in armor, sword in hand, a war-god in might and majesty, in the guise in which he has swept so often to victory, with all the power, though without the frenzy, of the desperate Macbeth.

In the night only Friedland's star can beam.

* * * Doubt disappears;

I fight now for my head and for my life.

A scene of extraordinary tenderness and most picturesque power follows. Ten cuirassiers, a deputation from the Pappenheimers, the "Old Guard" of this Napoleon of a former time, march in with steady discipline, led by a corporal. It is Max's regiment, the flower of the army. Imagine them,—gray, stalwart, scarred, in corslets dented with the blows of Lützen, stepping with one foot-beat, drawn up at length in rigid line. The lofty leader receives them with deep respect, addressing them one by one by name.

"I know thee well. Thou art out of Brüggen, in Flanders. Thy name is Merci,—Henri Merci. Thou wert cut off on the march, surrounded by the Hessians, and didst fight thy way with a hundred and fifty through their thousand." Turning to a second,

¹ Wallenstein's Death, act iii, scene 4.

“Thou wert among the volunteers that seized the Swedish battery at Altenburg.” To a third, “And thou it was who broughtest in the Swedish Colonel Dübald, in the camp at Nürnberg.”

Each has done some heroic deed, and the only promotion desired or received is the privilege of serving in this corps. They have come to learn from the duke's own lips what he intends. They discredit the reports as to his treason, and will stand by him unless he tells them himself he is a traitor. Wallenstein talks with them as friend to friend, though sundered so widely in rank, yet dear brothers in arms, loving and beloved, comrades since youth through dangers and hardships untold, inseparably bound to one another until now. He gives utterance to the nobler purpose that is blended with his ambition, to restore to the empire peace after the weary years of war; and as he unfolds his design, so grandly beneficent, when we think of the character of the court from which he has torn himself, we feel like saying: “Better faithlessness with such aims than fidelity to the bigot and tyrant.” The simple hearts of the soldiers are touched. He has not yet distinctly said that he means to accomplish this by being false to his oath. A tremor of indecision passes along the rigid line; the knees seem about to bend, that falling before him they may promise him new fidelity, and the bearded lips quiver toward a shout of enthusiasm. But Buttler breaks in impetuously: “General, your body-guard are tearing the imperial eagles from their banners.” It is a definite act of treason. Abruptly the corporal

gives the command, "March." They are again men of iron. "Halt, children, halt!" cries Wallenstein, despairingly. Onward they go, in utter disobedience. They are out of the presence, with their comrades, and instantly the whole corps is drawn out before the palace with hostile purpose. They demand their colonel, Max, who they declare is there a prisoner.

Max is indeed there, the prisoner of love, standing at Thekla's side. Wallenstein threatens and appeals; Max wrestles with his agony; while, with an increasing uproar of shouts and cannon-shot, the Pappenheimers press on from without. Shall the youth follow his duty, or stay with his traitor leader and the maid to whom his soul is given? He appeals to Thekla, unmanned as he is, to decide for him. The passage that follows is the most exalted in the drama. Thekla, although in the decision her heart breaks, bids him not hesitate:

Follow thy first impulse.
True to thyself, so art thou true to me;
Fate separates us, yet our hearts are one.
A bloody gap must part eternally
Thee from the ill-starred house of Wallenstein.
Forth, forth; O, hasten quickly forth, to sever
Thy cause from ours, for our cause is accursed.
My father's guilt hurls me too to destruction.¹

Just here is heard from without a loud, wild, long-resounding cry, "Vivat Ferdinandus!" Cuirassiers, with drawn swords, throng into the hall, collecting fast in the background, while spirited passages from the Pappenheimers' march seem to

¹ Wallenstein's Death, act iii, scene 21.



call their chief. For the last time Max seeks to approach Thekla ; but Wallenstein, determined, in his vesture of steel, stands between. Max cries :

Blow, blow, ye trumpets, all so wild and shrill !
Would that ye were the trumpets of the Swedes
That I might go from hence straight to the field, —
At once receive into my tortured breast
These naked swords that flash around me here.
What would you? have you come to force me hence?
Drive me not onward into black despair.
Think what you do. Comrades, it is not well
To choose a desperate man to lead you on.
What, will you tear me forth? Ah, well! Ah, well!
To Furies dark I dedicate your souls;
It is your own destruction you have chosen.
Who goes with me, let him go forth to die.¹

The hall has become completely filled with armed men ; the trumpets are blowing with shorter pauses ; everywhere is the gleam of rapidly-brandished steel. A quick movement among the cuirassiers, — they are forth, bearing Max in their midst.

And what is the end? From Pilsen the scene is transferred to the fortress of Eger, whither the traitor Wallenstein has hurried to meet the Swedes. On their way they hear heavy firing, for which they cannot account. Suddenly news comes by a Swedish courier which thrills them all. This is his message :

We stood, by no means thinking of attack,
At Neustadt, covered by but weak entrenchments,
When near the evening heavy clouds of dust
Came rolling from the wood. Our vanguard flying
Rushed into camp and cried the foe were close
We had but time to throw ourselves like lightning

¹ Wallenstein's Death, act iii, scene 23.

Into the saddle, when in full career
The Pappenheimers through our rampart broke.
In utter rashness had their courage led them
Far on before the rest. The Pappenheimers
Alone had followed bold their leader bold.
Recovering, in flank and front we pressed them
Most hotly with the horse straight to the ditch;
There stood the foot, hastily ranked, but stretching
A hedge of pikes to meet them as they came.
Forward they could not; they could not retreat,
Wedge'd in a crowd within the fearful strait.
Then cried the Rhein-graf to their leader fierce
Good terms proposing, if they would surrender.
But Colonel Piccolomini (his helmet plume
And flowing hair, disordered in the foray,
Had made him known) gave signal for the trench,
And spurred his noble horse across the first.
His regiment leaped after, but 'twas done!
Pierced by a pike, his charger madly reared,
Threw to the ground his rider, and away
Over his body plunged the maddened troop,
Not heeding any longer bit or bridle.
Then raging desperation seized the men;
When they beheld their leader fall and perish,
They thought no longer of their own salvation.
They fought like raging tigers, and our force
No quarter showed, enraged by the resistance.
The dreadful battle's end came not until
Their last man fell.

To-day we buried him.
Twelve youths of noblest birth the body carried;
The whole command accompanied the bier;
A laurel decked the coffin, and the Rhein-graf
Himself placed there his own victorious sword.
Tears were not wanting for his fate unhappy.
Many of ours have known his spirit's greatness,
And felt his gentleness when taken captive.
His fate touched all of us; the Rhein-graf longed
To spare his life, but he himself refused it.
'Tis said he wished to die.¹

¹ Wallenstein's Death, act iv, scene 10.

This is the message. Thekla totters under the stroke; for the moment her mind becomes disordered. She hears her lover's voice calling to her from afar; around her troop the multitudinous ghosts of those who died with him, reproaching her for being less faithful than they. She goes forth in the night to the grave where the Swedes have buried him, and we see her no more.

We are now at the close. As night comes, the conspirators, secure of making junction with the Swedes close at hand, engage in loud revel. Suspicion is everywhere lulled; Wallenstein, in a remote wing of the fortress, prepares for rest; but we know what it means when the gloomy Buttler says to a subordinate:

Find me twelve strong dragoons; arm them with pikes,
For there must be no firing.

In the shadows the soul of Wallenstein is cast down.
He utters a manly outburst of grief over the youth
he has loved:

See him again! Oh, never, — never again!
He is the fortunate; his life is ended.
For him there is no longer any future,
And fate for him no farther treachery spins.
His life lies foldless, shining pure behind him.
No darkness spots it. No unhappy hour
Knocks for him now, some fell misfortune bringing.
Far has he gone from wish and fear; belongs
No more to the deceitful, fickle planets.
Oh, it is well with him; but who shall say
What the next hour, so darkly veiled, brings us?¹

He lies down perturbed. The relentless Buttler has

¹ Wallenstein's Death, act v, scene 3.

planned all well. The conspirators are slain at the feast, and now the evil angel hovers above the greater victim. A chamberlain interposes, and is run through the body by a dragoon. There is a rush over the form into a gallery; two doors are heard to crash, one after another, as they are burst in, voices deadened by the distance, a clash of arms, then all at once a profound silence. The deed is done.

The trilogy of "Wallenstein" is a magnificent picture of the seventeenth century, faithful to the minutest details. In preparing for the representation Schiller did not disdain to take anxious care even for the costuming; and even Göthe, who during the seven long years of its composition had been taken again and again into counsel, and beheld the result of his friend's intense labor with enthusiasm, concerned himself to have strictly correct the fashion of the doublets, the length of the partisans, the workmanship of the swords, as he had before concerned himself with the conception of the characters. In a letter which Schiller writes to his friend Körner, he says: "My deepest heart is not fairly interested in the work. I am somewhat cold with all my enthusiasm. Two figures excepted,—Max and Thekla,—whom I love, I treat all the rest, especially the main character, merely with the love of the artist." The remark, if we develop what lies within it, is very significant. For the most part, the characters of "Wallenstein" are men of violence, thrown to the surface in a period of convulsion, tragically picturesque, but shapes of terror. In Wal-

lenstein something higher indeed is presented, but in him the ruling quality is boundless ambition. He is originally noble, and his finer nature long holds him back from the abyss of crime. Even when his treason is committed, we feel that it is immensely palliated by the beneficence which he means to work, as he describes it in his speech to the wavering Papenheimers. Still it is the securing of good by the commission of evil ; to the bonds of an evil passion he is distinctly a captive, and he sacrifices to his sinful selfishness the happiness of those he loves best, his daughter Thekla and Max. It is all magnificent and impressive, — this mighty star-questioning Titan, about whose feet bend submissively so many thousand darkened souls, — but we can understand Schiller when he says his heart is not interested in him. Toward Max and Thekla, however, his heart goes forth. These portraitures, as a great writer has said, “are two forms of celestial beauty, who diffuse an ethereal radiance over all this tragedy ; they call forth the finer feelings, where other feelings had been aroused ; they superadd to the stirring pomp of scenes which had already kindled our imaginations the enthusiasm of bright, unworn humanity, the bloom of young desire, the purple light of love. There are few scenes in poetry more sublimely pathetic than their parting. We behold the sinking, but still fiery, glory of Wallenstein, opposed to the impetuous despair of Max, torn asunder by the claims of duty and love ; the calm, but broken-hearted, Thekla. There is a physical pomp corresponding to the moral grandeur of the action ;

the successive revolt and departure of the troops is heard without the walls of the palace ; the trumpets of the Pappenheimers reëcho the wild feelings of their leader. Max is forced away by his soldiers, and next day come tidings of his fate, which no heart is hard enough to bear unmoved.”¹

Precisely where Wallenstein is wanting, on the moral side, are Max and Thekla strong. Max is aghast at the very mention by his father of Wallenstein’s meditated treason, and heart-broken at its confirmation. The incomparable Thekla, at the moment of crisis, flings to the winds his happiness and her own, while she bids him be faithful, and abandon her father and herself. There is in them fidelity to the highest duty.

“A poem,” says Taine, “is like a shell. Behind the shell there was an animal ; behind the poem too was a man. We know the creature from the convolutions which were moulded upon him ; we know the soul by that which grew upon it and from it.”² The “Wallenstein” grew upon and from the spirit of Schiller ; we see the soul through the work,—the creature through the convolutions of the shell. But is it always so? Do the greatest poetic artists thus reveal themselves? Shakespeare does not ; Homer does not ; Göthe, at his best, does not. The remark has been quoted that Schiller always shines through in his plays. To apply to Schiller the figure of Taine is only expressing the

¹ Carlyle: *Life of Schiller*.

² *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise*.

same idea by a different trope. "Wallenstein" was moulded upon the soul of Schiller,—a soul very lovable,—but the fact that it is so visible detracts from the artistic result. It is plainly a subjective composition, the poet bodying forth the ideals of his own spirit, not painting the world of men and women. Though truer to nature than the characters of "The Robbers," the figures in "Wallenstein" are far enough from being Shakespearian transcripts. Max and Thekla in particular are supernal beings, of a purity more than mortal,—not flesh and blood types.

Some dramas of Schiller may have particular advantages over "Wilhelm Tell." For my own part I am more impressed by "Wallenstein." "Marie Stuart," the "Maid of Orleans," the "Bride of Messina" have each their admirers. Certainly, however, "Wilhelm Tell" is the best known and most popular, and perhaps it is right to say it is artistically the most perfect. In this Schiller reached more nearly than elsewhere that after which he had striven since he turned himself again to the drama, namely a good objective presentment, in which he succeeded without denying his own great nature or pushing it into the background. Not by a particle is his ardor diminished for the great ideas which inspired him when he wrote "The Robbers." His sense of human dignity is as noble, his love for freedom as absorbing; these have grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength; but now he expresses them, not in an unreal world, through the

medium of moral characterizations, but through creations conformed closely to life, whose individuality is that of veritable men.

Descending from the Saint Gothard Pass, like so many another traveller I left Andermatt in a mist, and when I came at last to the Devil's Bridge a tempest was howling through the ravine. The rain swept downward; the roaring Reuss threw its spray upward, as if the demons were fighting in the black pass between the awful precipices, with floods for weapons. I pressed on past the towering Bristenstock; drank at the cold torrent that runs from the Maderaner-Thal past Amsteg, and soon was in the open valley below. At nightfall I came, foot-sore, upon the rough pavement of Altorf, and was soon at rest in the inn. My mind was full of thoughts of Tell; I obstinately rejected the mythical explanation of the story; I insisted upon believing it in all its length and breadth. I beheld with thorough credulity the spot pointed out to me as the one on which his little son stood with the apple on his head, and the spot—a long bow-shot away—where the archer was posted, the extra arrow in his girdle for the heart of Gessler, if his aim toward the boy should miss. I thought with a thrill, as I went to bed, that I lay precisely in the path of that memorable arrow. The next day a short walk brought me, through the calm morning, to the Lake of the Four Forest Cantons. How crystal clear was the flood! How gloriously rose the Alps from the quiet mirror to their snows in the far-off heavens! It is wondrously fair, but as I moved on over the

lake, even the sense of natural beauty became dull before the overmastering legendary and historic interest. These were the spots celebrated in the tales heard in earliest childhood, which had become almost part of the soul. The little chapel at the base of the cliffs on the right marked the spot where Tell, his fetters unbound in Gessler's boat during the storm, leaped ashore, and escaped through the mountain passes. The patch of meadow to the left was the field of the Rütli, where the freemen gathered by night and swore to be one. The mountains in front hung over the gloomy pass Küssnacht, where at length the tyrant fell, Tell's arrow in his guilty heart. Rarely, rarely beautiful is the Lake of the Four Forest Cantons in its summer aspect. Think what feet have trodden those mountains, what voices of manhood have shouted in those glens, what glances darted from eyes aglow with the fires of freedom have shone in the dark pine forests, and the interest of the beholder is doubled! And who is the poet who, gathering from many sources the fragmentary, inspiring legends, has combined all into one whole, uttering them with manful sympathy, so that for the soul the presentment has the utmost kindling charm? Schiller it is,—and it is his swan-song. Even while before him moved in imagination the majestic panorama of mount and wood and lake, the outbursts of freemen ringing in his fancy, the rattle of knightly armor, the wild peal of the Alpine horn, — while he dwelt upon these and gave them all glowing embodiment, precipitate fate was already busy at the silver chord. Scarcely was

the strain finished when he passed from the sons of men. I do not need to tell the story of the play. It is the story of Tell; the portrayal of the effort of a most heroic soul, and the setting is hardly less fine than the jewel it encloses,—the painting of a magnificent nature, and in the midst of it a race ground down by oppressors, and starting nobly forward in the vindication of its freedom. Will it be believed that Schiller never set foot upon the soil of Switzerland? He had no personal knowledge whatever of the life he presented, of the nature of the land, of the character of the people. Struggling from first to last to keep the wolf from his door, in narrow surroundings, he never saw an Alp, perhaps hardly ever knew a Swiss. It cannot quite be said that he evolved the land from the depths of his own consciousness; but as from the study of a mill-flume, as already noticed, he made real to himself an ocean whirlpool, with like power of imagination, from the hints of travellers and historians, he created in his soul a land and a race with such vivid truth that one can believe himself charmed back into the age and country.

Yet in artistic respects Schiller never reached Göthe's wonderful height, fast though he grew toward it. What he said himself once of Göthe and himself, when he had not yet created his masterpieces, was always true: "With Göthe I do not measure myself, when he has a mind to apply his whole power. He has more genius than I, and at the same time far more wealth of knowledge; a surer sensitive faculty, and besides all this an artis-

tic taste, purified and refined with artistic accomplishments of every kind.”¹ Göthe knew actual nature and actual men better than Schiller, comprehending them more objectively, and in their many-sidedness; he presses into the most concealed depths of their souls, and can represent their innermost peculiarity. Schiller knows better what men should be, and feels more powerfully the aspirations which lead us from the actual to the ideal. Hence he knows how to strike chords which resound everywhere, to call man’s attention to his higher nature. Love for freedom, enthusiasm for popular welfare, hatred against tyranny, — these ideas prevail within him from first to last; for these ideas he makes it his mission to kindle the world, rather than to paint the world. And the world was indeed kindled. Less an artist than a teacher and preacher, he is in his works constantly didactic, constantly exhorting. This characteristic, the presence of which in his plays is so often brought against him as a reproach, gained him a popularity which without it he could not have had; in this way he worked immediately and surely upon the spirits of his hearers.

In closing now my account of the writings of Schiller, let me describe an interesting theory concerning the true function of Taste, to be found in his “*Æsthetic Prose*,”² which seems to me the most valuable discussion contained in his philosophical writings.

In days long ago, when the pedagogue whose lucu-

¹ Kurz.

² Briefe über die *Æsthetische Erziehung des Menschen*, translated by Rev. John Weiss, to whom I acknowledge obligation.

bration the kind reader at present honors was at the other end of the ferule, there was a certain patient, painstaking soul to whom it belonged to bring our declamation into shape, and I well remember a sentence by means of which he sought to train us in emphasis and enunciation. "To do what is *right*," he would say, "argues superior *Taste* as well as morals." "To do what is *right*," we boys would say, "argues superior *Taste* as well as morals." "A stronger emphasis on *right*," the teacher would say; "emphasize *Taste*. Now, once more after me." So once more it would be, "To do what is right argues superior *Taste* as well as *morals*." Scores of times we rang the changes upon it, our boyish noddles as unconscious of any meaning in what became familiar to the tongue as if it were so much Cherokee, until at length we passed from beneath the frown of the teacher, and proceeded diligently to forget his precepts. Something, however, remained buried in the brain, and years after, when a rough shake or two from the world had sobered the writer out of his youth, a little of the old teacher's instruction came to the surface, and the man saw a meaning in what to the child was a blank.

"To do what is right argues superior *Taste* as well as morals." It is a good sentence for elocutionary practice, and a far better sentence for something else, for there is a fine thought contained in it which will bear development.

Let us suppose spring to be at hand. The farmer is glad that, looking up into the tree-tops, he can see the vibrating head of the woodpecker beating his

reveille over nature about to awake, and the throbbing throat of the harbinger robin. As the season advances, the influences become so benignant and potent that even the sad and the anxious cannot resist them. No heart so wrapped in gloom that it cannot feel some gladness in the sunshine of mid-May. No spirit so soured that it will not be turned to a more amiable mood in going through a meadow peopled with the busy bobolinks. We go out into the woods and sit upon the grass among the old stones and trunks,—the forest veterans that are decorated all over with gray and yellow medals of lichen. We count the five white petals of the strawberry blossom. We study the stamens, shaped like little spades, and dusted with yellow, for something has used them for shovelling gold. We take dripping cresses from the brook-bed, and delight in the spring savor. We pore over the petals of apple-blooms, white and rosy-veined. We watch the clumps of dogwood lifting their snow-drifts into the air. There is no grief so deep that is not made to forget itself in some degree by these influences, no mind so absorbed that it is not called away from its brooding by these thousand delightful voices. The human heart grows soft with happiness, as the meadows grow soft with grass!

The quality in all these scenes and sounds of spring which has power to give us so much delight is, of course, beauty; and the faculty within us by means of which nature has made us capable of taking enjoyment in beauty is Taste. To be sure, it is the case that creatures that have none of this per-

ception for beauty, or Taste, yet enjoy the spring. We may be sure that the brute creation enjoys it, though it must be in a dull and incomplete way,—merely as the season that brings warmth and more abundant provender. The lowest order of human beings finds enjoyment in it for a similar reason. It brings a more genial sky ; it cheers with the promise of fruits and harvests to come. Its scents and savors and tones give a degree of sensual pleasure. Yet the spring can hardly be said to bring real delight except to those who can reach this glorious quality of beauty with which it is so pervaded ; in other words, those who have high Taste,—and the more developed and refined this faculty is in any one, the deeper the ecstasy which thrills him before the beauty.

Thinking of this beauty, which can cause us such delight, it is natural to ask whether beauty may not have some further use besides this of ministering to our mere pleasure. Mere delight, no matter how refined it may be, we believe is not an object after which we ought to strive ; or at least we believe that there is something grander which we can obtain, and that grander thing should occupy our attention for the most part. That grander thing is moral nobleness. The best thing in a human being we believe to be the instinct by which he gets hold of right,—the faculty by means of which he has the power of distinguishing between good and bad, and is made to see that the good is to be preferred. It is mainly through the action of this instinct that a man must be bent to choose the right in prefer-

ence to the wrong. No duty, therefore, presses us so urgently as the duty to make strong and acute this instinct, the germ of which at least we all have, and whose function is so important. But is there not some other faculty belonging to us, less important indeed than this instinct, and yet which, like this, has the effect to lead us to the right in preference to the wrong? If there is such a faculty, certainly it is worth while to cultivate it. This grand instinct—the thing that makes us noble, and which must guide us if life is to amount to any thing good—needs auxiliaries. If we have a faculty which can help it, by all means let us know what it is, that it may be strengthened and put to the best use.

This beauty, this quality with which the outward world is so charged, this same beauty belongs also to nobleness. This Taste, this faculty in ourselves through which we get hold of beauty, when strongly developed, influences us powerfully to choose nobleness. “To do what is right argues superior Taste as well as morals.” There is a beauty in doing right, and as Taste is the faculty to which beauty corresponds, the possession of Taste must lead us to a preference of right over wrong.

I do not think that any writer has recognized this more clearly or stated it more distinctly than Schiller. Here are passages from his “*Æsthetic Prose* :” “Taste, a pure and lively feeling for beauty, has the most salutary influence upon the moral life. In spirits that possess æsthetic refinement there is another court which not seldom compensates for virtue where that is deficient, and

assists it where it exists. This court is Taste. Taste demands moderation and decency, — makes a well-recognized demand of every civilized man that he should listen to the voice of reason, even in the storm of emotion, and set bounds to the rude outbreaks of nature. All those material inclinations and rude desires which so often oppose themselves rudely and stormfully to the practice of goodness have been outlawed from the mind by Taste, and in their stead nobler and milder inclinations engrafted, which relate to order, harmony, and perfection ; and although these are no virtues, yet they share one object with virtue. If now desire speaks, it must endure a severe scrutiny from the sense of beauty ; and if now the reason speaks and enjoins actions of order, harmony, and perfection, it finds not only no opposition from Taste, but rather the liveliest concurrence. Taste gives the mind a tendency appropriate for virtue, as it removes all those inclinations which hinder the latter, and excites those which are favorable. Taste serves as a surrogate for true virtue. Although a higher rank in the order of spirits would undoubtedly invest him who needed not the allurements of beauty to act in every crisis conformably to the reason, still the well-known limits of humanity compel the most rigid moralist to remit, in the application of his system, somewhat of its severity, and make more secure the welfare of the human race by the additional strong anchor of Taste.”

The poet is a human being who has high Taste. By means of this he selects beautiful things in the



world and in his reveries, and expresses them in becoming language. Now, whenever a true poet touches upon human affairs, what are the things that human beings do which he chooses for his themes? Brave and chaste and grateful actions for his heroes ; tender, true, and compassionate actions for his heroines. There is a beauty in nobleness, and the poet whose work it is to recognize beauty and express it chooses forms of nobleness. They please his own high Taste. He knows they will please the Taste of those for whom he writes, all the more in proportion to the refinement and development of the Taste. Hence there has been given to the world the gentle fortitude of Evangeline, the devoted innocence of Enid, the truth of Cordelia. In these heroines of poetry there is some form of nobleness. There is beauty in nobleness, and therefore the Taste of the poet selects them. It is not because the moral sense at the same time approves. That is but a prosaic faculty, by which the poet, soaring in his thorough fealty to beauty, would not deign to confess himself bound, and yet through his Taste he is brought to choose for his charming picture the very thing which the moral nature at the same time would select. The artist is a poet whose material is not language, but stone or color. His calling too is founded upon the sense of beauty in man. To that he also makes appeal. By virtue of his Taste he possesses the power of selecting beauty, and mark how, in his choice,—if his work have to do with human things,—whenever he desires to give profound delight, he makes some representation of

nobleness. He takes consecrated courage and represents it in some martyr ; or aspiration, and puts it into the countenance of the Madonna ; or contrition, and paints the tears of a Magdalene ; or heavenly purity, and delineates some adoring angel ! It is not because the moral nature approves these things. That is not the artistic faculty, and the painter or sculptor will not confess that he is bound by it. It is because these things delight the highest Taste. Searching for the most exquisite beauty, there is none found so fine and enthralling as the beauty of nobleness, and thus he is led into choice of the right almost as directly as the purest saint, owning only the sway of the high instinct for good.

It is right, then, to claim that the quality of beauty in the world has power to do something more for man than cause him mere delight. Beauty belongs to nobleness, and, acting upon the faculty of Taste, has power to allure us to good. But we must not press this claim too far ; it must not be forgotten that Taste is to be held as a mere auxiliary power. Says Schiller again : “ One suspects, with justice, a morality which is founded *only* upon the feeling of beauty, and has no other guarantee than Taste. Taste can *favor* moral conduct, but its influence can never *create* that which is moral.” The moral sense is our noblest faculty, and through that it must be mainly that we must be led to choose the right and avoid the wrong. If the moral sense is feeble, it is only a very little way that the Taste within a man will go toward making good the lack, no matter how refined and well-developed it



may be. It is not by any means the case that the most tasteful people are always the best. Among such people indeed the coarse vices have little or no popularity, but there are refined forms of evil — forms less shocking, yet none the less devilish — to which they may be deeply committed. A Taste for the beautiful, although it must certainly lead its possessor to admire nobleness with all its beauty, wherever he may see it, is yet seldom a power strong enough of itself to bring its possessor to the practice of nobleness in his own conduct. It is by no means the case that the poetic or artistic nature is always coupled with a noble life. Minds that conceive imaginings most lovely in their purity sometimes belong to persons whose hands are unclean with guilt. Mere Taste, however high and pure, can do little unless it be reinforced by an active spiritual principle. Upon that the main reliance must ever be placed for bringing man into his true path, and keeping him there. It is only as a help to the moral sense that we can maintain that the Taste for the beautiful has value in bringing men to nobleness. But putting it here in its proper place, who will say that it has no use? God implanted it in man that it might be to him a source of delight. That in part; and, besides that, we may believe that by Providential appointment it has a still grander utility. Beauty is poured liberally forth within the universe, but its choicest form is bestowed upon nobleness. Standing at the side of the grandest thing in a man's heart is placed this high Taste, that taking hold of the serenest and

sublimest beauty it may help in raising us up toward good.

In educating a human being, the important, fundamental things are held to be, enough knowledge and enough training of the mind to enable him to make his way in the world, and such a development of the spiritual nature as will keep him free from sin. Besides these, there are what are held to be the refinements of education, whose design is to make delicate and develop the Taste for the beautiful. No doubt there is a fault of estimating these at too high a rate and giving them undue attention, but there is another fault to the full as prevalent, — the fault of holding them too low. The faculty of Taste having the value that has been claimed for it, — not only as giving delight, but as influencing us to choose the pure, because it is beautiful, in preference to the impure, — it follows that all things that can make strong and delicate this high Taste deserve even a religious attention. Let Music and Art and Poetry bring their choicest things to the mind of the growing man. The quality which comes from a solitary bird-note, or chanting choir and organ-thunder, — which comes through the gates of the eyes to his soul from a leafy and blossoming landscape, or which enters the mind from the lesson or the metaphor of some true poet, — that same quality pertains likewise to truth and justice and gentleness. Foster the love for it as it manifests itself in music and nature and poems, and love grows for it in its every form ; until all that moral grandeur with which God would have his human child crown the immor-

tal soul wins our homage, not alone because it is the right, but because it is the beautiful.

Thus let us conclude our development of the thought of Schiller. Let the love for beauty grow under every stimulus which it is in our power to apply. It is the glory of the world, it is the crown of the angels, it is the radiance of Paradise. The instinct in us which makes us thrill at any spectacle of beauty,—this same instinct, refined, fastening itself upon the “Beauty of Holiness,” lifts us towards Heaven !

I call to mind the shadowed, quiet streets of Weimar. In one of them stands the modest house where Schiller lived and wrought when he was at his best,—a centre building running up into a sharp gable, with lower wings on each side. There, as he dreamed beneath that humble roof, passed before his spirit the brooding, stupendous Wallenstein ; and Max and Thekla, now aglow with the purest love, now crazed by the darkest despair. Again it was a vision of chivalric pomp which he saw, and in the midst of them a purity and faith superhuman, the voices of celestial visitors, then the roar of flames about the form of the fairest of martyrs,—which he bodied forth in the “Maid of Orleans.” With his spiritual sense he heard Mary of Scotland plead with her rival for her liberty ; then, while the splendor of a queen glowed about her, heard the dull stroke of the headsman’s axe. Anon sounded through his soul the sweet choruses of the “Bride of Messina,” and even while he sat oppressed by the overshadow-

ing death, he built, in imagination, the towering Alpine landscape, — crag, lake, waterfall, unperishing snow crowning solemn pine-forests, and among them a manful race, shouting songs of freedom. Only a little way off is the house of Göthe, larger, but still plain, fronting the quiet square. We can think of that so memorable friendship as they walked side by side, the one full of power and beauty, with eye and brow so radiant with genius, in form a Greek god; the other already marked with disease, — the chest hollow, the cheek hectic, — but with countenance stamped not less than the other with the divine gift. Or if we have difficulty in making them real to us, there, on the spot that knew them, they stand in imperishable bronze, — the same garb, the characteristic attitude, the eyes uplifted as if they saw in the clouds spiritual worlds aglow with beauty.

From the memorial, where they stand together upon one pedestal, let us go to their sepulchre. It is the crypt of the mausoleum of the grand dukes. As you descend into the proud tomb, at the foot of the staircase lie side by side, in coffins of oak, the poets who in life were friends. It is the proudest distinction of the ducal house of Weimar that it protected them in life; now in death, not divided from one another, their ashes rest in the same tomb with those of their patrons. On the lids of both coffins, the day of my visit, were wreaths of fresh flowers; on that of Göthe the wreaths were few, on that of Schiller the flowers were piled high. It was sixty-five years since that midnight of tempest when



Schiller was laid to rest ; the coffin-lid had bloomed perpetually, and now the fragrance and verdure are forever renewed. What is the mysterious spring-tide which, even there, in the abyss of the sepulchre, perennially calls such beauty and freshness into being? It is the love of the German heart : it clings to him because it feels its kinship with him ; it recognizes him as preëminently its type and spokesman, representing its ideals, its loves, its longings. If Göthe was the greater artist, he had not the popular heart. About the memory of Schiller has the love of the Germans folded itself as about no other. He lived in desperate times, when his land was in despair. His aspirations after freedom received a check in the French Revolution, whose beginnings he had hailed with enthusiastic hope. Shrinking in terror from its excesses, he grew cautious, but did not lose his republican spirit. In a certain way he has been not only the teacher of his race, but its savior. Said the speaker at the centenary of Schiller's birthday, in 1859 : " He was a seer, a prophet. A century has passed since his birth, and we revere him as one of the first among the spiritual heroes of humanity. A hundred years may roll away, another and yet another, still from century to century his name shall be celebrated, and at last there shall come a festival when men will say, ' See ! there was a truth in his ideal anticipations of freedom and civilization.' " ¹

¹ Friedrich Vischer, quoted by Gostwick and Harrison.



CHAPTER XV.

THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL.¹

Now that we have passed Göthe and Schiller, it becomes somewhat difficult to decide what line to follow in the history that remains. When the two great poets appear upon the scene, the glorious period of German literature, which in them reached its greatest brilliancy, was in its morning. Schiller died in 1805, Göthe in 1832. Before the first of these dates was reached the German nation had exhibited an immense expansion and increase of intensity in its intellectual life, which is yet to be perceived. Departments of intellectual activity in which the Germans had hitherto done little or no more than other races became filled with workers of genius, through whom the glory of their land reached the highest pitch ; so that other civilized nations have been forced to acknowledge them in this age, in many ways, the leaders of the world. With Kant begins the series of philosophers, peers in profound power of the greatest names of the earth. To this period belong the tireless scholars who have plunged to such depths of erudition, the range of whose vision is so immense, yet who sweep the field with glance so minute. To this period belongs the army of scientific investigators, — the Humboldts

¹ See Appendix, note C.

wandering the world over, making known the phenomena of earth, sea, sky, in remote corners, in caverns, upon mountain-peaks; the bright minds who in garden and laboratory, in mine and observatory, with microscope, telescope, spectroscope, with compass and line, have weighed, fathomed, measured the universe of matter. With all this intellectual life literature is concerned. If the term is understood comprehensively, the record of all this scholarship, of this accomplishment, physical and metaphysical, must find a place. It must be remembered however that it is simply at what the Germans call "*Die Schöne Literatur*" (*belles-lettres*, *polite literature*) that we have time to glance. Vague enough are the boundaries of the field, shading off everywhere by imperceptible degrees into the other fields that have been indicated. Preserving the limits as well as we can, we must push forward.

The important writers, the consideration of whom is now finished, — Lessing, Klopstock, Wieland, Herder, Göthe, Schiller, — have been called the six heroes of modern German poetry.¹ Each became the centre of a group of followers and imitators; each of these groups is numerous, and contains names with which the thorough student must make himself familiar. It would be a departure from the plan of this book, however, to consider them all here. We are restricted to the study of the polite literature, and even in that department we must limit ourselves. Like Switzerland in some past

¹ Vilmar.

geologic age, the field of German letters underwent, at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, a great upheaval. The whole area was lifted, and here and there shot forth peaks toward the sky. Like the dome of Mont Blanc, Göthe rises over all, but there are other heights of scarcely inferior altitude. As each main Alpine summit has its subsidiary system of elevations, ranging from snow-capped mountains to hillocks that just swell above the plain, so each great author stands as the centre of a group of literary personages, sometimes of great, sometimes of small significance. To try to enumerate these even would soon produce bewilderment. The effort of this book is to give the main configuration of the literary landscape; to show it in proper perspective,—the great peaks illuminated, the less important summits in a shadow that deepens as they grow lower. As in the Alpine world from Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa run off the highest among the subordinate ridges, so from Göthe and Schiller proceeds a development more noteworthy than from the other minds that have been mentioned. This is called “Romanticism,” and is so important that it must receive attention from us.

The magnificent activity of Göthe and Schiller at Weimar aroused enthusiasm in the breasts of many young men of genius. Jena, which was close at hand, where Schiller had been a professor, and with whose management Göthe was much concerned, became the centre of extraordinary literary life. This was called forth by the example of the

two poets, the young writers who now came forward treating them with great reverence. They were the spiritual children of the illustrious men, but soon departed from the precedents that had been set. For Göthe's classic preferences they substituted something different, and did not hesitate to criticise Schiller. But another influence must be mentioned which was important in evoking Romanticism. Though the vast subject of German speculative philosophy is beyond my scheme, it becomes necessary to make some mention of it, on account of certain important influences which it has exercised upon polite literature. Let us go back for a moment to Locke, whose teaching, so far as it can be given in a word, was that the mind has no ideas except those which it gains, through sensation and reflection, from the world outside of it. Only through the senses do we know of this outside world; what we thus learn we may modify by thinking upon it; there is no other source of knowledge. In opposition to this philosophy, which had great acceptance on the Continent as well as in England, Immanuel Kant, the son of a poor saddler, a professor at Königsberg, half a century later proclaimed his system. Without denying that some ideas were obtained from the outside world, through sensation and subsequent reflection upon it, he asserted that there were other ideas, with the existence of which experience had nothing to do, — which belonged to the soul itself, or were intuitively perceived by it. Even while he, the overturner of preceding systems, was living, new systems were founded upon his

creation. Johann Gottlieb Fichte worked all his life to make his generation better ; striving like a hero even while the French drums sounded into his lecture-room ; firing his students with eloquent words to take up arms for the fatherland, finally entering the ranks himself. Yet, as a philosopher, he taught that sensation as a source of knowledge must be thrown away entirely, declaring that we cannot be certain there is any outside world. In Fichte's idea the "ego," the "I" by which he understands the thinking soul, is the only thing of whose existence we can be sure. All existence outside the thinking soul,—the "non-ego," that which is not I,—is phantasmal ; it has no existence except in the thing perceiving. In other words, his philosophy is purely idealistic. So, with some modification, taught Bishop Berkeley ; so substantially believes the cultivated Brahmin in the East, who regards the world outside of himself as *maya*,—illusion, — no more real than the figures and landscape of a dream. Following on in the series, after Fichte comes Schelling, who taught that the "non-ego," the outside world, was in no way identical with the percipient, the "ego," but existed alongside of it ; that the opposition in which they stood to each other was united and reconciled in the higher absolute,—in God. It is but the merest adumbration of colossal intellectual structures ; it is all for which there is space, and all, I believe, that my scheme will demand. Kant at Königsberg, Fichte at Jena and Berlin, Schelling,— who through fifty years was a famous teacher, first at Jena, then at several other universities,— all had

multitudes of enthusiastic disciples, influencing largely the thought of their time ; these, as well as Hegel, Herbart, and Schopenhauer. The writers known as the " Romantic School " were followers of Fichte, and afterward of Schelling.

Recalling to your minds the division made of poetry, in a previous chapter, into objective and subjective, it will be remembered that Schiller may be taken as a type of the subjective class ; his tendency was to proceed from the idea within himself to the outward world, to hold the idea as most important ; and far from contenting himself, as objective poets do, with the faithful representation of the world and life, to use the world and life only as a source of illustration, a means for making plain the idea. Schiller read Kant with delight ; and it is plain to see that the influence of Kant, claiming as he did rights for the spirit which philosophers before him had denied, was to fortify Schiller in his tendency. As we have seen, the characters in many of Schiller's plays were, as he called them himself, monstrosities ; at any rate untrue to nature, as his scenes and situations were untrue to life, though in his later time he contrived to unite with his subjective method a more artistic representation of the world. As Fichte went a step beyond Kant, claiming for the spirit the " ego," the I, — everything, — and annihilating the outside world, the " non-ego," so the " Romantic " writers who followed him went a step beyond Schiller, carrying the subjective tendency to excess, while the objective presentment was treated with the greatest carelessness. If Schiller created

monstrosities, the Romantic writers sank into utter distortion and formlessness, often using mere incomprehensible mist-pictures. There are writers among them who show how the subjective tendency, uncontrolled, leads to the destruction of all art. Accepting a philosophy which taught that the outside world was phantasm, a mere imagination of the spirit, why should they respect it so far as to study it, or attempt to represent it with truth? Entirely in the sense of Fichte's system, they declared the ideal to be the uppermost principle in poetry, and demanded for it unconditional freedom. The form, as the mere outflow of the idea, was not to be determined in itself because dependent on the idea. As in philosophy the speculative reason, so in poetry is the fancy the principle alone creative, and the poet must therefore abandon himself to the suggestions of the fancy.

The Romantic writers found in Schelling the sentence, "Every phenomenon in nature is the incorporation of an idea." It came to be considered among them a main task of the poet to recognize in the phenomena of nature the ideas at the bottom of them. Poetry therefore became allegorical, since it was to represent material phenomena as the symbols of ideas. In their attempts at interpretation, they became lost in the deepest abysses of a dim mysticism.

There are still other characteristics of Romanticism which I must try to make plain. The social and political condition of Germany at the end of the eighteenth century was very discouraging.



Hope in the nation was wellnigh crushed out. As a consequence of the despair which prevailed, people became frivolous ; men said, We will laugh through life as we can ; it is at best full of mortification and outrage for us." Hence a class of writers became popular of whom the poet Kotzebue is a type, whose standards were very low, humoring, as they did, the disposition to indolence and frivolity. The guilt belonged to the leaders of the people rather than to the people. At the beginning of the period Göthe had given up his early, popular way of writing, and was devoted to abstruse art and science ; Schiller was in the ten years between his first and second periods, buried in metaphysics, not yet returned to his true path. The learned, for the most part, were busy building systems of speculation, while the fatherland daily suffered more and more. The people seeing no means or prospect of improvement, in their discouragement were disposed to make of literature a mere pastime, until in most minds the better taste seemed quite dead. They grasped greedily at the amusement offered them, by which they could forget present sorrows and become indifferent to country, freedom, and glory.

The founders of Romanticism were of a nobler strain than to take part with the frivolous writers. The ideal philosophy had somewhat estranged them from the firm ground of reality. Dissatisfied with the present, they naturally looked to the past for satisfaction, and became seized with an indiscriminate delight in mediæval times. In those times they saw only what was beautiful and good. A

German emperor chosen by German princes was the centre of the political world. Germany was at the head of christendom; a numerous nobility, free, independent, full of knightly prowess, respectful to woman, helpful to the oppressed, was the core of the German race, and spread its fame to the remotest lands. Religious feeling seemed to be the foundation of all life, filling men with wonderful devotion and humility. The world was united in one Church. The Romantic writers, inspired by Schelling, as we have seen, with a love for symbolism, gradually embraced the idea that that form of religion is truest which is richest in symbolical presentment,—therefore the Catholic faith. It was venerable because it had conquered the barbaric rudeness of the old German stock. It had been the source of a new civilization and art, and was wonderful with temples and pictures. They saw only one side. They came to regard the Reformation as the beginning and source of misery for the empire. So it was that the Romanticists became reactionary; they battled with the present and its requirements, opposed faith to free investigation, Catholicism to Protestantism, the rule of the nobility to government by the people, mediæval art to modern.

With all their errors, the Romanticists accomplished much good. At the time of the rise of the school, the “*Xenien*” of Göthe and Schiller appeared. With the efforts of these poets to break the influence of the frivolous writers the Romanticists coöperated. The world found something attractive in their mystic manner; the reference to mediæval



glories to the people was very kindling; in the youth sprang up a longing for a new birth of the fatherland, the enthusiasm over the brilliant past awaking the desire to produce a similar future. Then came admonitions to strive after it. The uprising against the yoke of Napoleon, in 1813, was largely due to poets of the Romantic school. The mystical ground was forsaken for reality in the battle-songs of Körner and Arndt; it was not until the last years of Göthe's life that the tendency finally died away.

This sketch of Romanticism¹ must seem somewhat undefined, but I cannot do better with it. Here once more are the main points. The intense idealism of Fichte, influencing powerfully young men of genius, at the end of the eighteenth century produced a school of writers whose characteristic was excessive subjectivity. Accepting moreover the doctrine of Schelling, that the outer world is only the reflection in symbols of the world of spirit, something in itself unreal, they depreciated it, and fell from distinctness of presentment into cloudy mysticism. Shocked moreover with the present, they turned to the past; shocked with French freethinking, they turned to the Catholic Church, which moreover commended itself as a faith in which truth was revealed by symbols. Romanticism had of course no exclusive possession of the field. Although it may be said to have started from Schiller, Schiller had no part with most of it, and his best works were writ-

¹ Based upon Kurz.

ten while it was gaining power. Göthe, although so revered by Romanticists, always held aloof. Metaphysics was distasteful to him ; he rejected the mysticism and enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, which contradicted his classic preferences—the preferences which became so marked in him after the period of his youth was past ; he moreover lived to see the tendency expend its force. Aside from these greatest men, the swarm of writers,—Kotzebue and his troop,—who have been designated as frivolous, appealed to the people and enjoyed immense popularity. As one of several currents then Romanticism strove, attaining at length great importance. It had its influence upon English thought, Coleridge beyond all—the rhapsodizing sage, in dreamy essay and rapt monologue, turning from the extreme of freethinking, not quite to Catholicism, but to high Anglicanism—being its representative. Very noteworthy too in America has been its fruit,—nothing else than the Transcendental movement, with *The Dial* for its organ, Emerson for its poet, Margaret Fuller for its critic, Alcott for its prophet, and O. B. Frothingham for its historian. In the career of some of its professors, Orestes A. Brownson for example, we may see the reactionary tendency fully carried out. Unmistakably the seed was blown hitherward from the vigorous plant that sprung in Germany from the soil of Idealism ; although the influences of the new hemisphere modified the development of the germ, the substantial identity of the plant with its German progenitor is very plain.

Turning now to some study of the men of the



Romantic school, we find as their precursor the important figure of Jean Paul Richter. He was four years younger than Schiller, and struggled up through the deepest poverty, until he at length obtained recognition as one of the most gifted men of his time. After an enormous accomplishment,—he is said to have written more than sixty volumes,—he died at Baireuth in 1825. The names even of his books cannot be mentioned except in a ponderous list. The romance “Hesperus” established his fame; in “Levana” he considered education; in the “Campaner Thal,” immortality. Then there are “Titan,” “Selections from the Papers of the Devil;,” “Biographical Recreations Beneath the Skull of a Giantess,” “Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces,” and so on,—titles sometimes poetical, sometimes most grotesque, sometimes most baldly commonplace,—the list giving some hint of the character of the contents and the author. He is the strangest, possible compound of humor, pathetic tenderness, fine imagination. I do not find him anywhere more vividly characterized than in this passage from Longfellow: “When you read his works it is as if you were climbing a high mountain, in merry company, to see the sunrise. At times you are enveloped in mist, the morning wind sweeps by you with a shout, you hear the far-off muttering thunder. Wide beneath you spreads the landscape,—field, meadows, town, and winding river.”

* * * “You revel like the lark in the sunshine and bright blue heaven, and all is a delicious dream of soul and sense, when suddenly a friend at your

elbow laughs aloud, and offers you a piece of Bologna sausage." * * * "At times glad, beautiful images, airy forms, move by you, graceful, harmonious; at times the glaring, wild-looking fancies, chained together by hyphens, brackets, and dashes, brave and base, high and low, all in their motley dresses, go sweeping down the dusty page like the galley-slaves that sweep the streets of Rome, where you may chance to see the nobleman and the peasant manacled together." * * * "And the figures and ornaments of his style, — wild, fantastic, and at times startling, — like those in Gothic cathedrals, are not merely what they seem, but massive coignes and buttresses which support the fabric. Remove them and the roof and walls fall in. And through these gargoyles — these wild faces, the images of beasts and men carved upon spouts and gutters — flow out, like gathered rain, the bright, abundant thoughts that have fallen from heaven."¹ Here is Heinrich Heine's characterization: "Jean Paul's periods consist of little rooms, which are often so narrow that if one idea meets another there they bump their heads together; above on the ceiling are hooks on which Jean Paul hangs all kinds of thoughts, and in the walls are secret drawers in which he conceals feelings. No German author is so rich as he in thoughts and feelings, but he never lets them grow ripe, and with the wealth of his mind and soul he furnishes us more astonishment than refreshment. Thoughts and feelings which would grow to great

¹ Hyperion.



trees if he allowed them to take root properly, and expand themselves with all their branches, blossoms, and leaves, these he picks off when they are nothing but little shrubs, often mere buds, and whole intellectual forests are in this way set before us on a common plate as vegetables. This is strange food, which one can hardly enjoy ; for not every stomach can bear, in such a mass, young oaks, cedars, palms, and bananas. Jean Paul is a great poet and philosopher, but it is impossible to be more inartistic than he in creating and thinking. In his romances he has brought into the world genuine poetic figures, but they all drag about a foolishly long umbilical cord, entangling and strangling themselves with it. He often disguised himself as a clumsy, beggarly fellow ; then suddenly, like the princes *incognito* whom we see upon the stage, he throws off the rough overcoat, and we see then the gleaming star.”¹ To put the matter in less glowing terms, he had poetic genius of the first order, but no power of combining particulars to a harmonious whole. At the slightest hint his fancy is led to new series of thoughts. Like a cheerful, lively child sent out on an errand, he was diverted by all he found in his way, by meadow and wood ; now chasing a butterfly, now picking berries, now listening to the birds, forgetting his special work. He mistook his genius in attempting connected works ; in the idyl he would have been a master. He had the deepest sympathy with the poor, and it is unfortunate that one who so

¹ Die Romantische Schule.

labored to comfort the wretched did not write so that they could understand him ; even for Germans, there is a special dictionary for Jean Paul. Yet he abounds in richness of wit, splendor of expression, graphic power, beauty of rhythmic movement. As grotesque and as noble he was as a man. " I see him," says one who remembered him at Baireuth, " with his majestic, mountainous forehead, his mild blue eyes, and finely-cut nose and mouth ; his massive frame clad loosely and carelessly in an old green frock, from the pockets of which the corners of books project, perhaps the end of a loaf of bread and the nose of a bottle ; a straw hat lined with green lying near him, a huge walking-stick in his hand, and at his feet a white poodle. You would sooner have taken him for a master-carpenter than for a poet."¹ In many ways we have his counterpart in English literature in Carlyle, who is without doubt his spiritual child. We may call him the precursor of Romanticism, but must not identify him with it. " He was," says Brandes, " the antipodes of classic culture, though it cannot be said he had the mediæval preferences. He was as a poet excessively subjective, for he it is who speaks out of all his personages, whatever they may be called. He treated moreover the external form with measureless indifference, putting to shame the artistic sense in every page with the strangest incoherencies. In some ways however he turned against the Romantic tendencies as hollow and demoralizing fantasy. He

¹ Hyperion.



stood for the Reformation with stout Protestantism ; he was convinced too of the worth of the ideas which lay at the bottom of the French Revolution, to have produced and established which he felt to be the glory of the eighteenth century.”¹

Coming now to writers who are really representative of Romanticism, we encounter first a name to English ears even more familiar than that of Jean Paul,—that of Schlegel. Four men made the name illustrious in literature in the last and the beginning of the present century. It is with the second generation that we have to do,—the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel. August Wilhelm, the elder, is best known to English readers,—a man of vast accomplishments who early made himself famous through writings and lectures upon subjects of art and literature. As a poet he resembled Herder, understanding, like the great preacher of Weimar, how to appropriate the foreign and reproduce it in his own tongue. Shakespeare, Calderon, Petrarch, Dante speak through him as no doubt they would have spoken had they talked German. His original pieces have the merit only of a certain exterior grace. As a critic he resembles Lessing, though he must be put far below the mighty achiever of the “*Laokoon*.” “He had appropriated Lessing’s great battle-sword, but his arm was much too weak to strike the blows of the champion.”

¹ *Hauptströmungen der Literatur des 19ten Jahrhunderts.*

² Heine.

His main work however, the well-known lectures upon Dramatic Literature, has great excellencies.

Without stopping to trace out his affiliations with Romanticism, let us pass to the far more noteworthy younger brother, Friedrich Schlegel, the abler man, and the more important in the present connection, because from him largely proceeded the ideas on which Romanticism rested; he moreover carried them out fully, showing in his career every phase of the development, and is to be regarded as the best type of the school. While a youth at Göttingen and Leipsic, Friedrich Schlegel showed great force of intellect. At this time he came under the influence first of Fichte, then of Schelling. He married a daughter of Mendelssohn; at length at Köln he became a Catholic. He went to Vienna, and was received with distinction, being selected to accompany the Archduke Charles in the campaigns of Aspern and Wagram, during which he issued proclamations which had a powerful popular effect. His learning was immense, extending even to Sanscrit, which he first introduced to German scholars. He lectured on philosophy, history, and literature; was famed as a poet and a brilliant talker. He died in 1829.

I have called him the best type of Romanticism, exhibiting as he does in his career every phase which has been described as characteristic of the development. Coming in his youth under the influence of Fichte's idealism, he shows in his writings mystical obscurity. Following Schelling in considering nature only a symbol of the spiritual, he loses all



clear sight of history and the relations of life. Sad-
dened by the hard circumstances of Germany, he
obtained comfort by turning to the past, and in his
contemplation became dazzled with the glory of the
Middle Ages, forgetting their shame. In particular
he was attracted to the ecclesiastical life, beholding
in the Romish Church the acme of artistic and hu-
mane culture, the fosterer of art and poetry, the
mother of civilization. Blind to its shortcomings,
he became its votary, and longed to see it at the
centre of modern life, as it had been in mediæval
days. Of his sincerity there can be no more question
than of his genius. As he was eloquent and learned,
he was a great poet; would indeed deserve here
to stand among the immortals, were it not that all
flows onward in such dreamy, sounding indefiniteness,
with only now and then an intelligible tone. "The
arabesque," said he, "the musical swaying of the
line, the contours not more definite than the clouds of
evening,—this is the oldest and most original form
of poetry."¹ No better name can be given to his own
poems; they are arabesques,—not transcripts of any
thing existing, but lines and contours swaying with
exquisite indefinite grace according to the fancy. In
his learning, in his dreamy philosophy, in his power
of eloquent utterance soaring into brilliant rhapsody,
in his mystic, strangely beautiful poetry we shall find
his counterpart, I think, in the English Coleridge,
who indeed at the same time with him had stooped
and drunk from the spring of the same enchanters.

¹ Quoted by Brandes.

When one passing from Eisenach beholds the Wartburg crowning its wooded summit, there is nothing better to have in mind than Friedrich Schlegel's enthusiastic rhapsody written here in 1802, in which, forgetting for the moment his mysticism, he glorified the old time.

“On the mountain's height there dwelt the heroes of old, the knights of the beautiful land. Weaponed with iron, from the fastness of stone they looked boldly down into the valley. The woods all green around, clothed in sun and mist, exhaled from a thousand pores refreshment, and murmured deep songs when swept by the tempest, as out of the dark mystery of the lofty North. Full of thought and blessed, in the summer, stood the hero at the window. Lifting his helmet's visor, he traced in the dizzy pathways of the clouds the forms of giants mysterious. Smiling in joy, how broad and slow winds the stream, now black, now silver, through the plain growing green! There are the pleasant villages at the side, the beautiful cities, with slender towers vocal with bell-tones. Slowly proceeds along the highway in the valley the wealth of the East in full triumph, chariots and men, glowing stones and blooming fruits, India's golden blessing.

“When the spring blooms he sweeps through the forest, now in the company of his retinue, now buried in his own thoughts, where no tread resounds, where the wild beast no longer flees, looking at him with intelligent eyes. Joyfully returns he again to his cliff in the evening. Full of charm approaches the lofty lady of his heart. They look into one



another's holy eyes ; joyfully does virtue embrace the hero, and in the midst of joys she girds him with a mighty sword to extinguish all vices. But when the brown earth is frozen, and the rivers gleam like iron, and the woods shine white, then by the cheerful hearth they listen to old stories, — how the dwarfs live in the caverns. In spirit they behold the abysses aglow with lights, full of treasures and gnomes.

“So lived the heroes of old, the knights of the beautiful land. And when at last they departed, Michael took them in his mighty arms and bore them to Heaven ! In their gleaming armor they stood before heavenly heroes. Full of devotion kneeled the knight, bowing his head as he beheld the celestial purple of love, the blood of eternal hope, until, blessing, the hand of the Saviour touched him. Then felt he the clasp of venerable Charlemagne, and Roland and Reinhold gave him welcome and comfort.”

Of greater fame in Germany than Friedrich Schlegel was Ludwig Tieck, who becoming known at Jena to the Schlegels as a gifted young man, came under the same influences that affected them. He was for a time greatly overestimated. His life extended to 1853, and he too exhibited that appalling German fecundity which forgets that the existence of the longest-lived reader is but a span, and his power of comprehension and his eyesight limited. His scholarship was broad ; he made Shakespeare, the old German poems, the literature of the south of Eu-

rope better known. In particular, he translated well "Don Quixote." "If it was the intention of Cervantes in "Don Quixote" to gibbet the fools who wanted to restore the mediæval chivalry, and so recall to life a defunct past, it is an amusing irony of fate that it is Romanticism which has given us the best translation of a book in which their own absurdities are most effectively raked."¹ He was able as a critic, and dealt indefatigably with fairy tales.

As a poet, he cultivated especially the lyric. Among his many gifts was a marvellous histrionic faculty, which might have made him a great actor. He used it, however, solely for the amusement of his friends; sometimes giving tragedy, sometimes comedy, with superb effect. An amusing story is told of his carrying through, alone, a piece containing five or six strongly-contrasted characters, one of whom was an orang-outang, represented as a sentimental admirer of Kotzebue. Although he was a bright light of the Romanticists, he did not always remain one, forsaking at length their peculiarities and writing his later pieces in the purer taste of Göthe. Seeking for the characteristics which make it appropriate to class him with the Romanticists, we find that he had excessive subjectivity, striving to impress his own sense, whims, dreamings, upon the objects of nature. "Many a thing," he says, "should occur to a man in a natural object, in a lake or a leaf, which certainly does not lie in the thing for another organized being, but merely in the

¹ Heine.



soul of the beholder." Instead of showing respect, so to speak, for the rights of the object, the interpretation of it becomes upon this theory a merely arbitrary matter. For Tieck, what lay in nature was what lay in his own soul, — the whims which often were more attractive the more eccentric; he descended into his own consciousness to get the image of his camel. In a great part of his lyrics he represents the things of nature as personified, making them then speak out the sense of which in his idea they were symbols, following the thought of Schelling. They are often lovely, but utterly arbitrary. They give not nature, but attractions, secret yearnings, and vaporous whims; and corresponding to the inner uncertainty was the form vague. Speaking of Tieck's lyrics in his Romantic period, says Brandes: "They resemble those of Göthe as the clouds in the horizon resemble firm snow mountains. The hearer stands opposite them like Polonius in "Hamlet," only more honestly doubtful than he, and cannot tell whether it is most like a camel, a weasel, or a whale."¹

But the most gifted and interesting of the Romanticists is yet to be described. Riding from Leipsic westward toward Thuringia, the traveller will catch sight of the town of Weissenfels, beyond the river Saale, a strong castle in the centre. Here Gustavus Adolphus left his armor when marching out to the plain of Lützen, not many miles away, and here they

¹ Hauptströmungen.

brought his body afterward for the embalming. But an even more tender association with the town is that here, in the position of a government official,—as strange a place for him as the Salem custom-house for Hawthorne,—Friedrich Georg von Hardenberg, or, as he is known in literature, Novalis, with a hectic flush on his beautiful face, dreamed and yearned away the brief years of his manhood. He died at twenty-nine. He had grown up a delicate child, coming in youth under the spell of Fichte, and becoming acquainted with the Schlegels. In him we find the strongest idealism, before which the outer world becomes the merest shadowy veil; a tendency to symbolism so strong that not only do natural objects stand for ideas, but even the simplest and commonest relations of life—commerce, mining, agriculture—he surrounds with a solemn mystic light, seeking to impart to them a supersensual significance. He was penetrated with enthusiasm for the mediæval life, and abjured Protestantism for the older faith. His spiritual songs are full of that sweet mysticism to be found in Tauler, from which came, in part, the Reformation,—rarely beautiful in their vapory unfolding with iridescent fancies, and suggesting in their forms the robes and wings of angels. But in his incomplete romance, “Heinrich von Ofterdingen,” we find his most characteristic work. Heinrich is a mediæval hero, a minnesinger, but with every step the presentation falls more and more away into the incomprehensible. Novalis concerns himself with the most supernal matters, which from their nature cannot be em-

bodied objectively. The figures, which at first have some distinctness, vanish more and more until all becomes dream-like and allegorical. There are passages worthy of the greatest poet ; these are oases in a rainbow-hued waste, areas of definiteness in an impenetrable mist that covers every thing.¹ The Germans find some resemblance between Novalis and Shelley, and a parallel perhaps can be drawn ; the same superb poetic gift, in both vagueness of presentment, the spirit in its proud self-assertion disdaining all bonds of form, for both the early grave. But on the other hand the fervor of Catholic piety in Novalis, that sings happiness in Jesus and rhapsodizes over the communion, contrasts strongly with Shelley's defiant unbelief. I give a passage from Heine's consideration :

“The muse of Novalis was a pale and slender maid, with earnest blue eyes, golden, hyacinthine locks, smiling lips, and a little red mole on the left side of her chin. In other words, I always conceive the muse of Novalis as the maid who first made Novalis known to me. She dressed always in blue, and was called Sophia. She lived a few stations from Göttingen, with her sister, the postmistress. She was tender as a sensitive-plant, and her words were as fragrant and purely sounding, and if they were put together they became verses. One of these poems, which she repeated to me when I took leave of her, is especially dear to me. In a garden, in autumn, in which there has been an illumination, a

¹ Kurz.

conversation is heard between the last taper, the last rose, and a wild swan. The morning mists break in ; the taper is extinguished, the rose withers, the swan unfolds his wings and flies southward. Once in a dead swan's breast we found an arrow, which Professor Blumenbach recognized as African. Poor bird ! with the arrow in the breast it had returned to its mother to die. When late in autumn I returned from the south, my way led me near Göttingen. When I asked the postillon Piepe about the sister of the postmistress, he replied : ' Miss Sophia will die soon, and she is an angel already.' Miss Sophia was standing at a window, reading. When I went up to her, I found again in her hands the ' Ofterdingen ' of Novalis. She had read constantly in this book, had read consumption out of it, and looked like a gleaming shadow. But she now possessed a spiritual beauty, the sight of which moved me most painfully. I took her two pale, thin hands, looked deep into her blue eyes, and asked at last for her health. ' I am well,' she said, ' and shall soon be better.' She pointed out of the window to the new church-yard, a little hill close by the house. On the bleak hill stood a single, small, dry poplar, on which a few leaves yet hung, which swayed in the autumn wind, not like a living tree, but like a tree's ghost. Under this tree now lies Miss Sophia. The souvenir she bequeathed me, the ' Heinrich Von Ofterdingen ' of Novalis, lies before me now on my desk, and I am using it in writing this chapter."¹

¹ Die Romantische Schule.



I cannot even mention the names that are enumerated as belonging to this most loosely defined school. As with it cloudy incoherency became a principle, it seems to defy all classification and systematic treatment. Friedrich Schlegel, we have seen, comes nearer than any other one to showing in himself *all* the marks which are taken to characterize Romanticism. By far the greater part of the writers exhibit the characteristics imperfectly, and their connection with the development is often of the slightest. In fact, the classification is of the loosest, most unsatisfactory kind, only tolerable because nothing better is possible; it does suffice to furnish a thread which is of some help to a student in making his way among a multitude of names. Wackenroder, author of "Heart Gushings of an Art-Loving Cloister Brother," is a Romanticist mainly by virtue of the enthusiasm with which he adopted the faith of the Romish Church. "The notes of the full Latin chant which, rising and falling, made their way through the swelling tones of the instrumental music, like ships which sail through the waves of the sea, raised my spirit constantly higher; and when the music in this way had penetrated my entire being, and run through all my veins, then I raised my eyes and looked about me. The whole temple became living before my gaze, so intoxicated had I grown through the harmony. At the moment when it ceased, a priest stepped before the high altar, raised the Host with an inspired gesture, and showed it to the people. Then all the people sank upon their knees, and trumpets and powerful tones

of I know not what kind stormed and thundered a sublime devotion through all my limbs. Then it clearly seemed to me as if all those kneeling prayed to the Father in Heaven for the salvation of my soul, drawing me over to the faith with irresistible power."

Fouqué, the famous author of "Undine," is a Romanticist through the enthusiasm he felt for mediæval subjects; in still others the bond of connection is some tinge of mysticism. Wide apart as the poles from their dreamy brethren are Ernst Moritz Arndt and Theodore Körner. When Germany was on fire with aspirations for freedom, in 1813, these were the singers who wrote the lays the armies sang when marching into battle, that were sung in the homes to bring new armies forth. Most energetic, not a breath of vapory vagueness, not a whisper of allusion to any far-away time, they speak right to the German's heart with patriotism the deepest, with ardor that becomes sometimes ferocity. Such is the tone of Arndt's fierce thanksgiving to the God that made iron grow, so that there might be weapons; and of Körner's invocation to the sword, his bride,—a song which rang through his soul as he swept, in the saddle, on in a charge with Lützow's wild hunt, dashed down upon paper in the bivouac, while bugles were calling, the youthful hand that wrote it presently mouldering in a soldier's grave. The love of the fatherland thus expressed was really connected with the dwelling upon the glories of the ancient empire. First came the ardent remembrance of the splendor of the time of the Hohenstauffen; then the



desire to have it renewed; then the belief that it would be renewed; then, last in the development, the hot urging of the military spirit against the oppressor that stood in the way of the renewal.

Here is one of the "Sonnets in Armor"¹ of the poet Rückert, a collection of pieces which have the patriotic fire of Arndt and Körner:

What forge ye, smiths? "'Tis fetters we are making."
Alas! 'tis fetters ye yourselves are wearing.
Farmers, why plough? "Fruits must the field be bearing."
Yes, for the foe the crop, — yourselves in fetters quaking.
Hunter, what game? "The fatted deer I'm taking."
Death-aiming eyes on thee thyself are glaring.
Fisher, what dost thou? "Timid fish I'm snaring."
The hands of death to grasp thee now are aching.
Ye rock your children, loving, sleepless mothers,
That they may grow, and, while the land doth languish,
March with the foe, with wounds their country smiting!
What writest thou, O, bard? "Mine and my brother's
Shame in hot, fiery words, — my nation's anguish,
Which dares not for its freedom to be fighting!"

Rückert was one of the best Orientalists of his time, writing often under the inspiration caught from Eastern literatures. For his "Sonnets in Armor" mainly, however, he is to be classed among the Romanticists. Then Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano; Werner, — child of an insane mother, who believed herself, before his birth, the Virgin Mary pregnant with another Saviour, — a wild dramatist, later a Catholic preacher at Vienna, awing the world with a half-mad eloquence; Hoffmann, the writer of weird romances, whose counterpart is

¹ Geharnischte Sonetten.

Poe,—all these, and many another in this time and race full of seething intellectual life, poets, tale-writers, dreamers, scholars, we can link in one way or another to the Romantic school. There is only space for an account of the poet in whom Romanticism is considered to have come to its end,—Ludwig Uhland.

Uhland, born in 1789, has died almost in our own day. In his youth he felt strongly the influence of Romanticism, then in its fullest tide, and went from Swabia, his native land, to Paris, to study mediæval manuscripts. In 1813 he sang the uprising of the German people. When the downfall of the French power occurred, he became diverted from his proper path and took part in politics, withstanding with noble courage the petty despotism which in Southern Germany, when the foreign domination was broken, sought to reëstablish itself. Starting with the Romantics, he early showed a different tendency. He gave the school a new character, powerful with life; we may say he destroyed it, because he conquered its most essential characteristic, the dreamy, yearning, ideal indistinctness. Though a passionate admirer of the old literature, he felt no enthusiasm for the old empire; the intense subjectivity of Romanticism he forsook, and gave to the outer world due respect. Once more appeared in German literature the simplicity, truth, and unaffected grace of the *volks-lied*. His subjects are for the most part simple, and near to our sympathies; his lyrics sometimes pensive, but generally cheerful, abounding in love of nature, and sometimes humorous. His pop-



ularity was unbounded. As his followers became numerous they constituted what is called the Swabian school, several of them becoming poets of eminence. Perhaps his genius was at its best when he considered some mediæval subject, catching the spirit of the old minstrels, whose songs he so much loved. Of that kind is his famous drama, "Ernst von Schwaben," and many a sounding ballad which has the ring of the vigorous poets of the early time.

I translate here the song which Heine calls the most beautiful of Uhland's songs, one which in his boyhood Heine declaimed, sitting among the ruins of the old castle at Düsseldorf, until he heard his voice reëchoed by the water-spirits from the Rhine :

The handsome shepherd slowly strayed,
The king's high palace-hall in view ;
Forth from the turret looked the maid,
And full of yearning grew.

To him with sweetest voice she cried :
"O would I might come down to thee!
How white the lambs there at thy side!
How red the flowrets free!"

The youth her greeting straight returns :
"O would thou couldst come down to me !
Thy cheek with rosy beauty burns,
And white the arms I see."

And when he now, with heart aglow,
His flock each morning thither drove,
He gazed, till in her turret, lo,
Appeared his beauteous love!

Then he in friendly voice would say :
"Welcome, dear daughter of the king!"
"I thank thee, shepherd mine!" straightway
Her voice would downward ring.

The winter fled; then came spring-tide;
The flowrets bloomed the meadows o'er.
Straight to the spot the shepherd hied;
The maid appeared no more.

He called with voice all full of woe;
"Welcome, dear daughter of the king!"
"Adieu, adieu, my shepherd!" lo,
A *ghost's* voice down did ring!

That Uhland, who in his younger manhood wrote with such enthusiasm and success, allowed the lyre to become silent in his hands, as his life went forward, is due no doubt to the circumstances among which he was thrown. In public life he stood forth bravely and at great sacrifice in defence of popular rights, civil equality, and intellectual freedom,—the great Protestant ideas. Naturally his interest in a past whose institutions were Catholic and feudal was lessened. As Heine puts it: "Precisely because his intentions were so honest as regards the modern time, he could no longer sing the songs of the old time with his former enthusiasm. Since his Pegasus was a knightly charger only, which liked to trot back into the past, but immediately stood still when urged forward into modern life, the honest Uhland smilingly dismounted, had the obstinate beast quietly unsaddled and led into the stable. There he stands to the present day, and like his colleague, the horse of Bayard, has only one fault,—he is dead."

¹ Die Romantische Schule.



CHAPTER XVI.

HEINRICH HEINE.

In one of the old towns on the Rhine, I went to see a synagogue which tradition says was built before the Christian era. In Roman legions served certain Jews, who, stationed here on the frontier of Gaul, which had just been subdued, founded a temple of their faith. I felt that the low, blackened walls of time-defying masonry had, at any rate, an immense antiquity. The blocks of stone were beaten by the weather; the thresholds nearly worn through by the passing of feet; a deep hollow lay in a stone at the portal, where the multitude of generations had touched it with the finger in sacred observance. Within the low interior my Jewish guide told me a sorrowful legend, which was no doubt in part true, relating to a lamp burning with a double flame before the shrine. Once, in the old cruel days, that hatred might be excited against the Jews of the city, a dead child was secretly thrown by the Christians into the cellar of one of their faith. Straightway an accusation was brought by the contrivers of the trick; the child was found, and the innocent Hebrews accused of the murder. The authorities of the city threatened at once to throw the chief men of the congregation into a caldron of boiling oil if

the murderers were not produced. Time passed; the rabbi and elders were bound, and heard already, close at hand, the simmering of the preparing torture. Then appeared two strangers, who gave themselves into the hands of the magistrates, voluntarily accusing themselves of the crime. Into the caldrons they were at once thrown, from which, as they died, ascended two milk-white doves. Innocent, with a pious lie upon their lips, they sacrificed themselves to save others. To commemorate their deed, the lamp with the double flame had been kept forever burning within the low arch.

I walked one day through the Juden-gasse at Frankfort. The modern world is ashamed of the cruelty and prejudice of the past, and would like to hide from sight the things that bear witness to it. The low, strong wall however was still standing, within whose narrow confines the Jews were crowded, never safe from violence, or even death, if they were found outside at times not permitted. Many of the ancient houses still remained, the fronts discolored, channelled, towering up in mutilation and decay that were pathetic, as if they had partaken in the long suffering of their inmates, and were stained and furrowed by tears. From one of the battered houses came the family of Rothschild, to stand as the right-hand men of kings, and hold nations in their hands, exchanging the squalor of the Juden-gasse for palaces; but the old mother of the family would never leave the straitened home. She came to believe that the fortunes of her sons depended upon her remaining within the wall. She would go for a



day's visit to her sons in their splendid abodes, but at nightfall always returned, and in the Judengasse, at last, she died. The Jews of to-day seem to take pleasure in contrasting their present condition with their past misery. They have chosen to erect their stately synagogue among the old roofs, upon the foundations even of the wall with which the past tried to fence them off from all Christian contact.

In a certain sense, the most rationalistic thinker will admit that the Jews are "the chosen people of the Lord." For intense passionate force there is no people among the races of the earth so remarkable. In whatever direction the Jew sends his feeling, is it not right to say that he surpasses in earnestness all other men? If the passion be mean or wicked, to what depths will he not descend? Fagin and Shylock are our types of the extremity of unscrupulous malice. But if his hate is bitter, a force just as great, on the other hand, appears in his love. Be it child or parent, be it mistress, friend, or wealth, the Jew's love is the most intense of loves. If the yearning takes an upward direction, it becomes the purest and most earnest of religions, voicing itself in psalm and prophecy, becoming concrete at length in the Christ, the outshining of God Himself. The spiritual energy of the Jew manifests itself very strikingly in the tenacity with which he clings to his nationality. Eighteen hundred years have passed since the race, in its old home, was conquered and driven forth to the four winds. Since then what have they not suffered? Take the his-

tory of any of the civilized nations, and no page will be found quite so tragic as the story of its treatment of the Jews. Robbery and exile, torture and death,—not a woe that man can inflict upon his fellow-man has been spared them, and the agents of the cruelty have often felt that in exercising it they were only performing service to God. Men chivalrous and saintly have persecuted the Jews almost in proportion to their chivalry and sanctity. Richard Cœur de Lion taxes and massacres them without mercy; in the mediæval cities the hands that were shaping the great cathedrals heap up faggots by wholesale for the Jew-burnings; Ferdinand and Isabella drive them forth by thousands; Luther turns from them with abhorrence. In the oppression to which the race has been subjected, nearly all forms of activity have been forbidden to it except money-getting,—a narrow, sordid channel, but through that Jewish energy has rushed until, despised though the people were, they have had the world almost at their mercy. But beaten though their hands have been, their grip has hardly relaxed a particle upon the traditions and customs they value. Even in outward traits there has been little change. Abraham and Mordecai confront us to-day in the streets with the very features of their progenitors of the same names, as they stand fixed on the monuments of Nineveh. Whatever softening they may undergo through the influence of modern ideas, Jerusalem, to multitudes of them, is still their holy city; the babe must undergo circumcision; for themselves and the stranger within



their gates the unleavened bread must be prepared at the feast of the passover. Tenacity how marvellous ! The world, with blow after blow of outrage and contumely, has not been able to hunt the life out of its grizzly Judean prey.

It is only yesterday, as it were, that a beginning was made of lifting the weight off the shoulders of the Jews. When Lessing selected a Jew to be the hero of his grandest play, the innovation was so unheard of as to mark his intrepidity more strongly perhaps than any act he ever performed. Even late in the eighteenth century Jews were massacred in Europe. Up to the time of the Napoleonic wars, in most countries they were a race of pariahs. They had scarcely any rights in the courts ; on church holidays it was part of the regular celebration to hunt them through the streets and sack their houses ; in some cities only twenty-five Jews were allowed to marry during a year, that the accursed race might not increase too fast. So late as 1830, the Jews in Hamburg were hunted with the old bitterness ; even Solomon Heine, — the richest banker in Germany, the man upon whose shoulders the prosperity of the city to a large extent rested, who had given whole fortunes in the most catholic spirit for innumerable charities and public ends, — with difficulty saved himself from outrage.

A story how long and how tragic ! The Jew has paid back hate for hate, and scorn for scorn. I well remember going into the shop of a Jew in an ancient city, and, during our bargain, crossing his purpose in a way that aroused his anger. The flash in his dark eye was of the hereditary wrath bequeathed to

him from many generations of persecuted fathers, called forth by the son of the Christian, who stood before him ; in the hiss with which his words came forth I heard the serpent that had been gathering its poison for almost two thousand years !

Has the spirit of this race, so intense, so persistent, so trampled by persecution, ever found an adequate voice ? Yes, a voice which is pervaded with all the melancholy that such long-continued suffering would cause, in which we seem to hear sometimes the saddest wailing ; then again a terrible wit, sometimes indeed lightly playful, but more often resembling the laughter of a man mad through despair ; in which too there is at times a gall and bitterness, as of the waters of Marah, poured out too indiscriminately upon the innocent as well as upon those worthy of scorn, — the voice of Heinrich Heine.

He was born of Jewish parents, at Düsseldorf. "How old are you ?" says a personage to him in one of his works. "Signora, I was born on the morning of New Year's day, 1800." "I have always told you," said the marchese, "that he was one of the first men of the century." The Heine family came from Bückeberg, a little principality between Hanover and Hamburg, whose insignificance Heine merrily hits off as follows :

O Danton, thou must for thine error atone ;
Thou art not one of the true souls ;
For a man *can* carry his fatherland
Along with him on his shoe-soles.¹

¹ It was a saying of Danton that "a man cannot carry his country on the soles of his feet."



Of Bückeburg's principality
Full half on my boots I carried.
Such muddy roads I've never beheld
Since here in the world I've tarried.¹

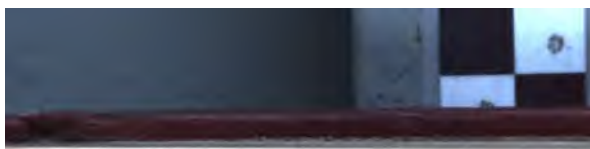
His father seems to have been a sordid, trading Jew; his mother however was of quick, impassioned, energetic nature, with much taste in literature, art, and music. To her the son often makes allusion, and his attachment to her, "the old lady of the Damm-thor,"—the name of the Hamburg gate near which she lived,—is a redeeming trait in a character in which there is more to blame than admire. During his boyhood in Düsseldorf he was a perfect type of the *gamin*, full of wit and mischief as an imp,—a bright-eyed, crisp-locked, elf-like little Jew, of unconquerable vivacity, whose Puck-like pranks kept the neighborhood alive, sometimes with amusement, sometimes with vexation. His poems preserve many childish reminiscences, but not in a more interesting way than his prose, in which he was not less a master. Of such recollections, which it is interesting to compare with the "Dichtung und Wahrheit" of Göthe, none are more interesting than those connected with the occupation of his native town by the French, portraying historic figures and the minute incidents of an interesting time with unexampled vividness. Whatever may be said of the effect of the Napoleonic occupation of Germany upon the Germans themselves, for the oppressed Jews it was a glorious deliverance from

¹ Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen.

the thralldom of ages. Heine's descriptions naturally are full of enthusiasm for those blessing-bringing conquerers. Perhaps at the present time it is healthful to read them, when the Germans seek to justify the hard measure they have meted out to their western neighbors by painting, with the strongest colors the calamities which, in the past, their land has suffered at French hands. For the Jews, Napoleon, at his coming, lifted a terrible yoke, which at his downfall in 1815 was again fastened to their necks, not to be removed until the uprising of 1848.

When Heine was nineteen he was sent by his father to Frankfort to learn business. Waterloo had come four years before, and in the restored order the Jews were thrust back into the old condition. As one passes through the *Juden-gasse*, it is perhaps the most interesting reminiscence that can be recalled that there, in the noisome lanes, moved the figure of the young poet, hearing with his fellows, at the stroke of the hour, the bolting of the harsh gates.

Soon after we find him in Hamburg, where his uncle, Solomon Heine, was the money-king of the great commercial city. In the history of Hamburg the name of Solomon Heine is one of the most important. Its prosperity is largely due to his enterprise, and at the same time, like many another of his race, he was distinguished for his benefactions, in which he showed the broadest charity. He seems to have been a man honorable and well-meaning in all his relations. He had children of his own, many

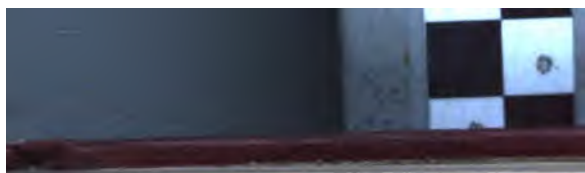


nephews and nieces, and more distant relatives, and appears to have tried, with much painstaking, to do his full duty to his family, as well as the world at large. His treatment of his nephew Heinrich has been called harsh, but it is easy to see there is a side to the story which partial biographers do not present. The old banker had no taste for literature, and when Heinrich appeared in his counting-room, behaving with more than the characteristic eccentricity of genius, he seemed to his uncle as unpromising among his numerous brood of fledglings as the ugly duck of the famous story of Andersen. During his entire life Heinrich received from the bounty of his uncle, and was remembered in his will. The gifts, to be sure, were moderate in amount, but perhaps that fact should be taken as a proof of Solomon Heine's wisdom. His nephew became indeed the first poet of his time,—"the greatest name in German literature since the death of Göthe."¹ During the greater part of his life however he was under ban in his native land, forced to live in a foreign city, his writings circulating surreptitiously, or, if permitted, subjected first to a rigorous censorship. As will be seen, the ruling powers did no strange thing in treating him with severity; they only acted in self-protection. A portion of his work indeed, aside from its political bearing, was actually immoral; nor was his life ever of a kind to satisfy those who held at all to propriety. Heinrich's relatives, who had expectations as regarded Solomon's wealth, treated

¹ Matthew Arnold.

him with much disfavor, leaving no stone unturned to set his uncle against him. They seem to have acted from the meanest motives; while hypocritically pretending disapproval, hoping to swell their own portions by diminishing what might be given to another. The uncle's position was one of great difficulty; a man without capacity or accomplishments to judge himself of his nephew's genius, disapproving moreover, to a large extent, of his writings and conduct, apparently anxious to do his duty, perhaps it may be said he did all that could be expected.

Convinced at last that a business career was out of the question for the nephew, the uncle offered to pay his expenses during a university course. We find Heine therefore, at twenty, going first to Bonn, then to Göttingen, with the idea of preparing himself to become an advocate. Even before this time he had been the victim of an unfortunate love affair, the lady being his cousin, who seems to have treated him heartlessly. Heine revenged himself by painting her portrait, under different names, in poems, showing first, in connection with this experience, that faculty for bitter speech for which he was to become so famous. It is pleasant to contrast with these the spirit of sonnets addressed about the same time to his mother. "Love," he says in one of them, "I sought in every street; for love I stretched out my hands and begged at every door." He describes further his effort to find love, declaring that he returned home, sad and weary, to find at last in the eyes of his mother the sweet love



that was denied him everywhere else. At Bonn and Göttingen Heine became associated with men afterwards distinguished, with many of whom, later in life, he came to stand in relations sometimes of friendship but more often of hostility. The study of law was repulsive to him; he pursued however literature and history diligently, occasionally composing poems. Some breach of rules at Göttingen brought about his rustication, and he went to Berlin, coming here under the influence of Hegel, then the ruling spirit in philosophy, by whom he was transitorily affected. "To speak fairly," he says, "I seldom understood him; and only at last by subsequent reflection did I arrive at an understanding of his words. I believe he did not desire to be understood, and hence his involved fashion of exposition; hence too perhaps his preference for persons who he knew could not understand him."¹

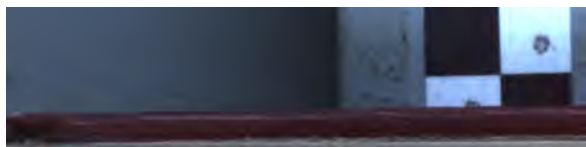
But perhaps the circumstance of his Berlin life most important in its effect upon Heine was the intimacy to which he was admitted by Varnhagen von Ense and his wife, Rahel, people of elegant culture and brilliant gifts, whose *salon* fills almost the place in the literary history of Germany that is filled by the Hotel Rambouillet in that of France. The friendship of Heine for Varnhagen was one of his most permanent affections. Heine was contributing now to literary periodicals, and attracting much notice. It is creditable to him that at this time he admired Lessing ardently. "I am awe-struck,"

¹ Quoted in Stigand's *Life of Heine*.

he cried once, in Unter den Linden, "when I think that Lessing may have stood here." He saw much of the life of the city, which he described in a graphic, racy way, beginning to lay the foundation of his fame as a writer of brilliant prose, — a fame which was to equal that which he gained as a poet.

Heine received his degree of Doctor in 1825, shortly before which time he published in book form a collection of his poems, which in this way were widely circulated. Though the power of the singer is not yet at the full, the collection contained exquisite pieces. The influence of Romanticism is plainly to be seen. The poems are in great part pervaded by the melancholy coming from unrequited love, a mood into which the poet seems to have been brought through his unhappy passion for his cousin. His conception of love is far enough from being the highest, and sometimes a bold, cynical defiance of propriety appears, which grew upon him as he went forward.

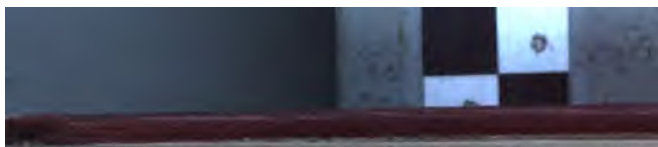
Though Heine was winning fame, he did not yet give himself to literature. He hoped for a government position or a university professorship, for either of which the abjuration of the faith of his ancestors was necessary. This was resolved upon, and he was baptized into the Lutheran Church. The change was made purely from motives of expediency, his convictions having nothing to do with it. He had no faith in the doctrines of the church into which he was received. With the narrow spirit of Judaism which he left he had never had sympathy, though in his attachment to his race he



was a genuine Jew, and had associated intimately with certain free minds among them who wished to take advantage of the gradually relaxing bonds to help their fellows to breadth and intelligence. The apostacy was far from praiseworthy, though Heine should not be blamed too sharply. Such abjurations were common, and regarded by many Jews as venial. In a measure they were forced into the false profession, since only so did a career become possible. For years after, Heine's mind was ill at ease on this account, as appears from many passages of his letters. "I will be a Japanese," he writes; "they hate nothing so much as the cross. I will be a Japanese." The advantage he sought he did not gain; his position became more uncomfortable than before. The stricter Jews looked upon him as a renegade; the contempt felt toward him by narrow Christians was not affected by his change. As if to show he was still a Jew at heart, he undertook at this time a novel, the "Rabbi of Bacharach,"—a picture left incomplete, but full of moving traits of the sorrow of the past.

How moving too is the following: "When I saw 'The Merchant of Venice' given at Drury Lane, there stood behind me a beautiful, pale English lady, who at the end of the fourth act wept earnestly, and cried out several times, 'The poor man is wronged!' It was a face of the noblest Grecian cast, and the eyes were large and black. I have never been able to forget them, those great black eyes which wept for Shylock. Truly, with the exception of Portia, Shylock is the most respectable

personage in the whole play. He loves money, to be sure, but there are things which he loves far more, among others, his daughter, 'Jessica, my child.' Although he, in his deep passion, curses her, and would like to see her lying dead at his feet, with the jewels in her ears, with the ducats in her coffin, yet he loves her more than all the ducats and jewels. The domestic affections appear in him most touchingly. Far more than all historic personalities does one remember, in Venice, Shakespeare's Shylock. If you go over the Rialto, your eye seeks him everywhere, and you think he must be concealed there behind some pillar or other, with his Jewish gaberdine, with his mistrustful, calculating face, and you think you hear even his grating voice, 'Three thousand ducats; well.' I at least, wandering dreamer as I am, looked everywhere on the Rialto to see whether I could find Shylock. Seeing him nowhere, I determined to seek him in the synagogue. The Jews were just celebrating here their holy day of reconciliation, and stood wrapped in their white robes, with uncanny bowings of their heads, appearing almost like an assembly of ghosts. But, although I looked everywhere, I could not behold the countenance of Shylock. And yet it seemed to me as if he stood concealed there, behind one of those white robes, praying more fervently than the rest of his fellow-believers, with tempestuous wildness even, at the throne of Jehovah. I saw him not! But toward evening, when, according to the belief of the Jews, the gates of Heaven are shut, and no prayer finds admission, I heard a voice in which the tears



were trickling as they were never wept with eyes. It was a sobbing which might move a stone to pity ! They were tones of pain, such as could come only from a breast which held, shut up within itself, all the martyrdom which a tortured race has endured for eighteen hundred years. It was the panting of a soul which sinks down, tired to death, before the gates of Heaven. And this voice seemed well known to me. I felt as if I had heard it once, when it lamented in such despair, ‘Jessica, my child.’”¹

In this period of his life Heine strikes into that mocking vein of writing which he preserved so constantly afterwards that his biographer declares there is no piece of his prose, excepting his will, which does not somewhere show it. He never suffered so intensely that he could not employ this inimitable raillery ; no themes were so grave as to make it seem to him inappropriate. Leaving Göttingen for a journey in the Harz, he laughs mercilessly at his old associates : “ I have especial fault to find that the conception has not been sufficiently refuted that the ladies of Göttingen have large feet. Yes, I have busied myself from year’s end to year’s end with the earnest confutation of this opinion ; and I have to this end attended lectures on comparative anatomy, made extracts from the rarest works in the library, studied for hours at a time the feet of the ladies who pass over the Weender Strasse ; and in the profound treatise which shall contain the results of

¹ Shakespeare’s Mädchen und Frauen — Jessica and Portia.

these studies I speak (1) of feet generally ; (2) of the feet of the ancients ; (3) of the feet of elephants ; (4) of the feet of the ladies of Göttingen ; (5) I collect together all the remarks I have heard about these feet in Ullrich's garden ; (6) I regard these feet in relation to their proper bodies ; (7) if I can get paper of sufficient size, I will add thereto some copper-plate engravings, with portraits, life-size, of the ladies' feet of Göttingen." Again : " In front of the Weender gate two little school-boys met me, one of whom said to the other, ' I will not walk with Theodore any more ; he is a low fellow, for yesterday he did not know the genitive of *mensa*.' " A hit at the pedantry of the town.¹ There is much however that is severer in his sarcasm. For Göttingen he seemed to have an especial hatred, and we cannot wonder that his old teachers and the people of the town felt incensed.

We cannot go with him step by step. He has arrived at fame. A multitude of readers follow his pen with delight. His songs are everywhere sung ; his witty and graphic prose commends itself no less. His *nonchalant* irreverence, which not infrequently runs into insolence and blasphemy ; his disregard of proprieties ; his outspoken scorn of the powers that rule, bring down upon him, not unnaturally, fierce persecution. He travels in various directions, his sparkling record keeping pace with his steps. For a time he is in England, a country which he hated.

" I know a good Hamburg Christian who could

¹ Die Harz-reise.



never be satisfied that our Lord and Saviour was by birth a Jew. A deep wrath seized him every time it came to him that the being who, as a model of perfection, deserves the highest admiration, belonged nevertheless to the company of those long-nosed gentry whom he sees, as old-clothes men, peddling about the streets, whom he so thoroughly despises, and who are the more unpleasant to him since they, like him, deal in groceries and dye-stuffs, and so injure his private interests.

“As this excellent son of Hammonia feels about Jesus Christ, I feel about William Shakespeare. My spirit faints when I consider that he was an Englishman, and belongs to the most repulsive people whom God in his wrath has created. What a disgusting people! What an unrefreshing country! How stiff, how cockneyish, how selfish, how narrow, how English! A land which the ocean would have gulped down long ago, if it had not been afraid that it would make him sick at the stomach. A gray, yawning monster of a nation, whose breath is nothing but choke-damp and mortal tediousness, and which will certainly hang itself in the end with a colossal ship’s hawser.”¹

Again, he is in Bavaria, — in Munich, — which Ludwig I. is trying to make the centre of art and cultivation for Germany. “That the town should be called a ‘New Athens’ is somewhat ridiculous. This I felt most deeply in my conversation with the Berlin Philistine who, although he had been talking with

¹ Preface to Shakespeare’s *Mädchen und Frauen*.

me some time, was impolite enough to miss all Attic salt in this New Athens. 'That,' cried he, 'is only to be found in Berlin. There only are wit and irony. Here there is good white beer, but truly no irony.' 'We have no irony,' cried Nannerl, the tall waitress, who came skipping by at this time; 'but you can have every other kind of beer.' I began to instruct her in the following manner: 'Nannerl, irony is not beer, but an invention of the Berliners, the most knowing people on the face of the earth, who are vexed that they have come too late into the world to invent gunpowder, and who therefore sought to establish an invention which should be equally important, and even be useful for those who have not invented gunpowder.' 'Allow me,' said the Berliner, 'to interrupt you. What white, shaggy dog is that, without a tail?' 'My dear sir, that is the dog of the new Alcibiades.' 'But,' said the Berliner, 'where is the new Alcibiades himself?' 'To confess honestly,' I answered, 'the place is not yet filled up; we have however got the dog. Only the lowest grades are occupied; we have no lack of owls, sycophants, and Phrynes.'"¹

He goes to Italy through Tyrol. "The Tyrolese are handsome, cheerful, honorable, brave, and unfathomably stupid. They are a healthy race, perhaps because they are too stupid to be able to be sick. Of politics the Tyrolese know nothing but that they have a kaiser, who wears a white coat and red breeches. So much their old uncle told them, who

¹ Reise von München nach Genua.



heard it himself, in Innsbrück, from the black Sepperl, who has been in Vienna. When now the patriots clambered up to them, and expounded to them fluently that they had now got a prince who wore a blue coat and white breeches (Napoleon), then they seized their rifles, kissed wife and child, descended from the mountains, and got themselves shot for the white coat and dear old red breeches.”¹

Heine at length reaches Paris, an exile from Germany, where the governments had become so incensed against him as to make him an outlaw. Henceforth the city is his home. He is constantly busy with writing, does much as a critic of art and literature, much in the field of politics. His poems are numberless; sometimes simple and sweet throughout as an outgush from the heart of the most innocent of children; sometimes with an uncanny or diabolic suggestion thrown in at the end, as the red mouse at length runs out of the mouth of the beauty with whom Faust dances in the Walpurgis-nacht; sometimes again full of a very vitriol of acrid denunciation. He wrote much upon German topics for French readers, and, in spite of his outlawry, keeps himself before the German world by contributions to journals of position. He becomes interested in the religious and social doctrines of Saint Simon. His life is far from commendable, but he becomes at length the subject of a sincere attachment. His loved one is a grisette, a woman quite without education, or the power of appreci-

¹ Reise von München nach Genua.

ating her lover's gifts. "People say," she said, "that Heine is a very clever man, and writes very fine books ; but I know nothing about it, and must content myself with trusting to their word." She was however a woman of excellent heart, a faithful lover, helper, and companion of the man who chose her. For years their connection had not the sanction of marriage. When however he was about to risk his life in a duel, they were formally united to one another in the Church of Saint Sulpice, Heine wishing to do all he could to make her position comfortable if he should be slain. During the years that followed their love deepened, and perhaps it may be said that in Heine's entire career there is nothing so creditable as his unwavering affection and care for his "Nonotte."

Theophile Gautier thus describes him : "A handsome man of thirty-five or thirty-six years of age, with the appearance of robust health. To look at his lofty white forehead, pure as a marble tablet, and overhung by abundant masses of blond hair, one would have said he was a German Apollo. His blue eyes sparkled with light and inspiration ; his round, full cheeks were of an elegant mould. Vermeil roses bloomed there in classic style ; a slight Hebraic curve baulked the intention of his nose to be Greek, without disfiguring its purity of line ; his harmonious lips went together like two fine rhymes,—to use one of his own phrases,—and had in repose a charming expression. But when he spoke, from their crimson bow there sprung and whizzed pointed and barbed arrows and sarcastic darts which never

missed their aim ; for never was a man more relentless against stupidity ; to the divine smile of Apollo succeeded the sneer of the satyr.”¹

The story of the last years of Heinrich Heine is one of unparalleled sadness. He was attacked with a terrible disease — the softening of the spinal marrow ; it stretched him upon his bed, where he lingered eight years, enduring great agony. His body was, to a large extent, at length paralyzed. The sight of one eye was gone ; he could see from the other only by lifting with his fingers the paralyzed lid. He wore out the weary years on his “mattress-grave,” as he called it, nursed by his devoted wife. Propped up on pillows, he sometimes caught distant views of the street, where he envied the very dogs their liberty. The terrible chastening brought no softening to his spirit. It is a dark life almost everywhere ; but as he lay stretched upon his “mattress-grave,” there was a bitterness in his mocking, an audacity in his blasphemies, which the wildest declarations of his preceding years had not possessed. Yet through all he loved his wife, he loved the old lady of the Damm-thor, from whom he took the greatest pains to conceal his condition, lest she might be distressed. No moanings from an Æolian harp were ever sweeter than the utterances which occasionally came as the tempestuous agony swept down upon him. We see too a better side in his will : “I die in the belief of one only God, the eternal creator of the world, whose pity I im-

¹ Stigand.

plore for my immortal soul. I lament that I have sometimes spoken of sacred things without due reverence, but I was carried away more by the spirit of my time than by my own inclinations. If I have unwittingly violated good manners and morality, I pray both God and man for pardon." At length came February 16, 1856. A friend, bending over him, asked him if he were on good terms with God. "Set your mind at rest," said Heine. "*Dieu me pardonnera; c'est son métier.*" So, with a devil-may-care mock upon his lips, the child of the Jew, in whom the spirit of the race, cruelly hounded through so many slow-moving centuries, at length found utterance for its sorrow, its yearnings, its agony, its implacable spite, went forth to his account.

That Heine was the most unaccountable of men will hardly need further illustration. In one breath he writes the "Pilgrimage to Kevlaar," a poem which one would say must have come from the heart of an artless, ignorant peasant, full of unquestioning Catholic piety; in another it is the grotesque satire "Atta Troll," in the course of which the conception entertained by pious hearts of Heaven and its denizens is burlesqued with unshrinking Mephistophelean daring. Here is his own description of a character full of contradictions, which might answer for himself: "There are hearts wherein jest and earnest, evil and good, glow and coldness, are so strangely united that it becomes difficult to judge them. Such a heart swam in Ma-

tilda's breast. Many times it was like a freezing ice-island, from which bloomed forth palm forests; many times again it was a glowing volcano, which is suddenly covered over by an avalanche of snow."¹

The difficulties of rendering in Heine's case are perhaps quite insurmountable. Nothing was ever so airy and volatile as his wit, nothing ever so delicate as his sentiment. In the process of translation the aroma half exhales; what, as Heine has distilled it, is most searchingly pungent, is insipid in a foreign phrase; what causes tears, as it flows on in the German rhythm in pathetic, childlike artlessness, in English words sinks to commonplace. Let us however attempt it. There has not lived in our time such a master of brilliant, graphic description. Here is a passage from his child-life at Düsseldorf, which I quote from the "Book Le Grand." The book is named from an old drummer, who fills the boy with Napoleonic inspirations:

"The drumming went on in the street; I went out before the door and beheld the French troops, who were marching in,—the rejoicing people of glory, who went through the world singing and making merry; the faces of the grenadiers, so earnestly cheerful; the bear-skin caps, the tricolored cockades, the gleaming bayonets, the infantry full of jollity and *point d'honneur*, and the almighty, great, silver-embroidered drum-major, who could throw his stick with the gilded knob up to the first story, and his eyes even to the second, where the pretty girls were

¹ Die Bäder von Lukka.

sitting at the windows." * * * "The neighbor's boy, Pitter, and long Kurz almost broke their necks at this time, and it would have been well ; for one ran away afterwards from his parents, enlisted, deserted, and was shot dead in Mainz ; the other made afterwards geographical explorations in strange pockets, became therefore a working member of a public spinning institution, burst the iron bonds which bound him to this and his fatherland, got happily across the water, and died in London of too tight a cravat, which contracted of itself when a royal official took the board away from under his feet."

Five years after Heine saw Napoleon himself. "It was in the alley of the palace-garden at Düsseldorf. When I pressed through the gaping crowd I thought on his deeds and battles. The emperor, with his suite, was riding through the alley ; the protecting trees inclined themselves forward as he went past ; the sunbeams trembled timidly curious through the green foliage, and in the blue sky above was swimming visibly a golden star. The emperor wore his unpretending green uniform, and the little, world-historic hat. He rode a white pony ; negligent, almost hanging, he sat, one hand holding high the reins, the other patting good-naturedly the pony's neck. His face had that color which we see in marble heads of Greek and Roman sculpture ; its features were nobly impressed, like those of antiques, and on this countenance it stood written, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' A smile which warmed and quieted every heart hovered about the lips ; and yet we knew that those lips

needed only to whistle, and Prussia would no longer exist ; those lips needed only to whistle, and all the clergy would be rung out ; those lips needed only to whistle, and the whole Holy Roman Empire would dance ; and those lips smiled, and the eye too smiled. It was an eye clear as the heavens ; it could read in the heart of man ; it saw with sudden quickness all the things of this world, while the rest of us only look at one another, and over colored shadows. The brow was not so clear ; the ghosts of future battles haunted it ; sometimes it moved convulsively, and those were the creating thoughts,—the great seven-mile-boots thoughts,—with which the emperor's spirit, invisible, strode over the world. The emperor rode quietly through the alley ; behind him, proud on snorting horses, and loaded with gold and ornaments, rode his suite ; the drums rolled, the trumpets sounded, and the people cried with a thousand voices, ‘ Long live the emperor ! ’ ”

Once afterwards Heine saw Napoleon, in 1812, previous to the Russian campaign. “ Never will this image disappear out of my memory. I see him even still, aloft upon his steed, with his eternal eyes in his marble, *imperator* face, looking down quiet as fate upon the guards defiling by. He sent them to Russia, and the old grenadiers looked up to him with such awful devotion, so consciously earnest, so death-proud,—*Te, Cæsar, morituri salutant.* ”

I cannot help quoting still more.

“ I speak of the palace garden at Düsseldorf, where I often lay upon the grass, listening reverently when Monsieur Le Grand told me of the war-

like deeds of the great emperor, and meantime, struck up the marches which were drummed during the exploits, so that I saw and heard every thing most vividly. I saw the march over the Simplon, — the emperor before, and behind the brave grenadiers climbing, while frightened birds shriek and the glaciers thunder in the distance. I saw the emperor, flag in hand, on the bridge of Lodi ; I saw the emperor in his gray cloak at Marengo ; I saw him on horseback in the battle of the Pyramids, — nothing but powder, smoke, and Mamelukes ; I saw him in the battle of Austerlitz, — phew ! how the balls whistled over the smooth, icy road ! I saw, I heard the battles of Jena, Eylau, Wagram. I could hardly bear it ! M. Le Grand drummed so that my own ear-drum was almost burst.”

For the last time the boy hears the old drummer. “ I heard behind me confused human voices, which lamented the fate of the poor French, who, taken prisoners in the Russian campaign and dragged to Siberia, had been held there many long years, although peace had been declared, and not until now were returning home. When I looked up I beheld really these orphan children of glory. Through the holes of their ragged uniforms looked naked misery ; in their weather-beaten faces lay deep lamenting eyes, and although mutilated, wearied, and for the most part limping, they still maintained a kind of military step, and, strangely enough ! a drummer with his drum tottered on before. The poor French drummer seemed to have risen half-mouldered out of his grave ; it was only a little shadow in a dirty, rag-



ged, gray capote ; a corpse-like, yellowish face, with a gray mustache, which drooped in a melancholy way over the pallid lips. The eyes were like burned-out tinder in which only a few sparks yet glimmer, and yet by one of these sparks I recognized Monsieur Le Grand. He recognized me too, and drew me down upon the grass, and there we sat as in old times, when he taught me French and modern history on his drum. It was the same old, familiar drum, and I wondered how he had kept it from Russian rapacity. He drummed now as he used to, only without speaking meantime. But if his lips were pinched together in an uncanny way, his eyes spoke all the more, gleaming victoriously as he drummed the old marches. The poplars near us trembled as he thundered once more the red march of the guillotine. The old freedom-struggles, the battles, the deeds of the emperor, he drummed as before, and it seemed as if the drum itself were a living being, which exulted at being able to speak out its inner joy. I heard once more the thunder of cannon, the whistling of balls, the tumult of battle. I saw once more the guards, brave unto death ; the fluttering colors, the emperor on his steed. But gradually a gloomy tone crept into that joyous rolling ; out of the drum resounded tones in which the wildest exultation and the most terrible lamenting were strangely commingled. It seemed a march of victory, and at the same time a march of death. The eyes of Le Grand opened themselves like those of a ghost, and I saw therein nothing but a broad white field of ice covered with corpses. It

was the battle of the Moskwa. I should never have thought that the old, hard drum could give forth such sounds of pain as M. Le Grand managed to evoke. They were drummed tears, which sounded lower and lower ; deep sighs broke from Le Grand's breast like a sad echo. He became gloomier and more spectral, his dry hands trembled with frost ; he sat as in a dream, only beating the air with his drumsticks, and listened as it were for distant voices ; at last he looked at me with a look entreating, and deep, deep as an abyss ; then his head sank in death upon his drum."

The description of the cholera in 1832 is very vivid. "We are put into the sack one after the other," said my servant to me every morning, sighing when he informed me of the number of the dead, or the departure of an acquaintance. The expression, 'to put into the sack,' was no figure of speech ; there was soon a want of coffins, and the greater part of the dead were buried in sacks. When, last week, I went by a public building, and in the roomy hall saw the merry people, the hopping, cheerful little Frenchmen, the pretty, prattling Frenchwomen, who were making their purchases there with a laugh and a joke, I remembered that here, during the cholera time, piled high upon one another, stood many hundred white sacks which contained nothing but corpses, and that one heard here very few voices, but all the more ominous,—namely, how the corpse-watchers, with an evil indifference, counted out the sacks to the grave-diggers ; and these again, while they loaded them on their carts, repeated the number

grumblingly, or rudely complained aloud, because they had received one sack too little; whereat not seldom a strange quarrel arose. I remember that two little boys with troubled faces stood beside me, and one asked me if I could tell him in which sack his father was."¹

The Germans have been accused of wanting greatly in wit and humor,² but certain it is that this German Jew, more than any man probably of the present century in the civilized world, possessed these gifts. We must regard him as a genius coördinate with Aristophanes, Cervantes, and Montaigne. His conversation was full of it, even when he lay in the greatest misery on his "mattress-grave." He was asked if he had read one of the shorter pieces of a certain dull writer. "No," said he; "I never read any but the great works of our friend. I like best his three, four, or five-volume books. Water on a large scale — a lake, a sea, an ocean — is a fine thing, but I can't endure water in a spoon."

Once, at a time of great distress, the physician who was examining his chest asked, "*Pouvez vous siffler?*" "*Hélas, non,*" was the reply, "*pas même les pièces de M. Scribe.*"

In many of his poems he rattles on in the merriest, most *nonchalant* carelessness, shooting out, now and then, the sharpest darts of spite. Poor Germany was forever his butt, as in the following:

¹ Die Cholera zeit in Paris, 1832.

² J. R. Lowell, Essay on Lessing. Matthew Arnold.

From Cologne, at quarter to eight in the morn,
My journey's course I followed;
Toward three of the clock to Hagen we came,
And there our dinner we swallowed.

The table was spread, and here I found
The real old German cooking.
I greet thee, dear old "sauer-kraut,"
With thy delicate perfume smoking!

Mother's stuffed chestnuts in cabbage green!
They set my heart in a flutter;
Codfish of my country, I greet ye fine,
As ye cunningly swim in your butter.

How the sausages revelled in sputtering fat!
And fieldfare, small angels pious,
All roasted and swaddled in apple-sauce,
Twittered out to me, "Try us!"

"Welcome, countryman," twittered they,
"To us at length reverting;
How long, alas! in foreign parts,
With poultry strange you've been flirting!"

A goose, a quiet and genial soul,
Was on the table extended;
Perhaps she loved me once, in the days
Before our youth was ended.

She threw at me such a meaning look!
So trustful, tender, and pensive;
Her soul was beautiful, but her meat —
Was tough, I'm apprehensive.

On a pewter plate a pig's head they brought;
And you know, in the German nation,
It's the snouts of the pigs they always select
For a laurel decoration.¹

What power of scornful utterance Heine pos-

¹ Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen.

sessed, the potentates of Germany who persecuted him felt to the uttermost, — none more than Friedrich Wilhelm IV. of Prussia and Ludwig I. of Bavaria. Both were monarchs possessed of intellectual gifts, and with many good purposes. Each however was, in his own way, narrow, weak, and self-indulgent. Never had archer such a keen eye for the joints in the armor of his foes as Heine. Here are some stanzas from "The New Alexander," directed against the king of Prussia.

There is a king in Thule who drinks
Champagne, — of that he's a great lover;
And always when his champagne he drinks,
His eyes go running over.

His knights in a circle about him stick, —
The "school historical" truly;
When his tongue becomes with drinking thick,
Then hiccoughs the king of Thule:

"When Alexander, in the old day,
With his little bands unshrinking,
Had brought the whole world under his sway,
The hero took to drinking.

The war had given him such a thirst —
The beating so many nations —
He soaked himself till he nearly burst;
He couldn't stand such potations.

Now I, you see, am of mightier stuff;
More prudent in planning and thinking;
For I begin where the hero left off, —
I put at the outset the drinking.

The hero's course, if I play the sot,
In the end I'll accomplish better;
For I, as I stagger from pot to pot,
Shall the whole creation fetter.

Champagne invites me — "the better land,"
 Where flourish the pleasant juices
 That fill me with inspiration grand;
 The sorrows of life it reduces.

Here shall be proven my courage dread,
 Here shall begin the battle;
 Let such blood as a bottle holds be shed,
 And volleys of stopples rattle!

* * * * *

I reconcile two divine extremes:
 My trust is in the Lord Jesus—
 But, as comforter, your monarch esteems
 Bacchus, let Bacchus ease us!"

The touch of blasphemy in the last stanza is thoroughly Heinesque. I have ventured to give it, even at the risk of shocking the sensitive reader. No portrayal of Heine would be truthful which should omit that trait. The "Song of Praise in Honor of King Ludwig," however, few translators would care to present to English readers. I give a few stanzas, allowing the passage at the close to remain in the original. Its audacity and acrid malice can scarcely be paralleled. Stupidly brutal was the heel that sought to crush him; but the snake, writhing and rearing its crest, strikes with fangs so full of devilish venom that we are full of pity for the oppressor.

In the "Walhalla," the magnificent temple near Regensburg, built by Ludwig to contain memorials of the great men of Germany, Luther was neglected:

The simpleton Luther there to see,
 In vain the visitor wishes;
 As in natural-history cabinets we
 Oft find no whale 'mong the fishes.

King Ludwig is a great writer of lays;
When he sings, the mighty Apollo
Falls down on his knees, and begs and prays,
"O stop; I shall soon be a fool, O!"

At length the king is represented as praying in the royal chapel before the image of the Virgin, who bears the Christ-child in her arms; he begs for some sign of her favor:

Straightway stirs the mother of God,
Her lips with a message are moving,
She shakes her head with impatient nod,
And speaks to her infant loving.

"Es ist ein Glück dass ich auf dem Arm
Dich trage, und nicht mehr im Bauche;
Ein Glück dass ich vor dem Verzehn
Mich nicht mehr zu fürchten brauche.

"Hätte ich in meiner Schwangerschaft
Erblickt den hässlichen Thoren,
Ich hätte gewiss einen Wechselbalg,
Statt eines Gottes geboren."

The brilliant wit and poet must be judged with severity, however beneficial the scourging may sometimes have been which he administered. No further illustration is necessary that his wit was often distorted to cynicism, his frivolity to insolence and vulgarity. It is hard to believe that he was earnest about any thing, — art, patriotism, religion, or freedom. In multitudes of passages, both prose and poetry, he suddenly interrupts the expression of intense emotion by a grotesque suggestion which makes the emotion or its object ridiculous. In the "Sea Vision," for instance, he represents himself

as leaning over the side of the ship, dreaming that he sees in the clear depths the vision of a city, which he describes minutely, with melancholy and passionate touches :

But just at that time
Did the ship captain
Pull me hard by the leg,
Back over the vessel's side,
Saying, with horrid laugh,
" Doctor, has the devil got you ? " ¹

For Napoleon one would imagine that he felt the most genuine and earnest enthusiasm of his life. The "*Book Le Grand*" contains a passage full of power, in which he denounces England for her treatment of the emperor at St. Helena ; yet as if an actor, after giving the curse of Lear, should suddenly thrust his tongue into his cheek and draw his face into a grimace, Heine ends his denunciation with a laughable turn :

" Strange ! a terrible fate has already overtaken the three principal opponents of the emperor : Londonderry has cut his throat ; Louis XVIII. has rotted on his throne ; and Professor Saalfeld is still professor at Göttingen ! "

Among English writers, Heine has points of resemblance with Sterne, — still more with Byron ; but, to my mind, his closest English analogue in genius and character is Dean Swift. In Swift's career it is perhaps the pleasantest incident that he could attract the love of Stella and Vanessa, and

¹ Sind Sie des Teufels ?

feel for them a friendship which perhaps amounted to love. In Heine's honorable affection for two women — his wife, "Nonotte," and the "old lady of the Damm-thor" — we see him at his best. Both Heine and Swift were place-hunters, who sought for advancement in questionable ways, only to be disappointed; for both there was disease at the end that was worse than death. Such gall and wormwood as they could pour upon their adversaries, what sinners elsewhere have tasted! With what whips of scorpions they smote folly and vice; but who will dare to say it was through any love of virtue? Both libelled useful and honorable men with coarse lampoons; in both there was too frequent sinking into indecency.

But there was a field in which the bitter dean had no part with the sufferer of the "mattress-grave." Heine was not altogether a scoffer; his power of touching the tenderest sensibilities is simply wonderful. In his plaintive songs the influence of Romanticism can be clearly seen, and also of the popular ballad, whose character he caught most felicitously. He assumed a certain negligence which gave his poems an air of pure naturalness and immediateness, whereas they were the products of consummate art.¹ But no poet has ever been able to convey more thoroughly the impression of perfect artlessness. The "Princess Ilse," for instance, one would say could have been written by no other than the most innocent of children:

¹ Kurz.

I am the Princess Ilse ;
To my castle come with me, —
To the Ilsenstein, my dwelling,
And we will happy be.

Thy forehead will I moisten,
From my clear flowing rill ;
Thy griefs thou shalt leave behind thee,
Thou soul with sorrow so ill !

Upon my bosom snowy,
Within my white arms' fold,
There shalt thou lie and dream a dream
Of the fairy lore of old.

I'll kiss thee, and softly cherish,
As once I cherished and kissed
The dear, dear Kaiser Heinrich,
So long ago at rest.

The dead are dead forever, —
The living alone live still ;
And I am blooming and beautiful,
My heart doth laugh and thrill.

O come down into my castle, —
My castle crystal bright !
There dance the knights and maidens,
There revels each servant-wight.

There rustle the garments silken,
There rattles the spur below ;
The dwarfs drum and trumpet and fiddle
And the bugle merrily blow.

Yet my arm shall softly enclose thee,
As it Kaiser Heinrich enclosed ;
When the trumpets' music thundered,
His ears with my hands I closed.

It is very pleasant too to read these lines to his
wife, written on his death-bed :

I was, O lamb, as shepherd placed,
To guard thee in this earthly waste.
To thee I did refreshment bring;
To thee brought water from the spring.
When cold the winter storm alarmed,
I have thee in my bosom warmed.
I held thee, folded, close embracing,
When torrent rains were rudely chasing,
And woodland brook and hungry wolf
Howled, rivals, in the darksome gulf.
Thou didst not fear, — thou hast not quivered
Even when the bolt of thunder shivered
The tallest pine. Upon my breast,
In peace and calm thou layst at rest.

My arm grows weak. Lo, creeping there,
Comes pallid death! My shepherd care,
My herdsman's office, now I leave.
Back to thy hands, O God, I give
My staff; and now I pray thee guard
This lamb of mine, when 'neath the sword
I lie; and suffer not, I pray,
That thorns should pierce her on the way.
From nettles harsh protect her fleece;
From soiling marshes give release;
And everywhere her feet before
With sweet grass spread the meadows o'er;
And let her sleep from care as blest
As once she slept upon my breast.

Once, at a critical time in our country's history, it happened to me to visit a negro school. We went from room to room among the dusky faces, until at last one said, "Let us have them sing." Presently the voices rose and fell in a marvellous song. Out of the windows the heavens hung sombre about us; the dark faces were before us; the children of the race whose presence among us has brought to them, in each generation, tragedy so pathetic, — the

race that has brought to us, so innocently, such subject for controversy, such occasion for bloodshed, and on account of which we still sometimes seem to hear such fateful thunder-mutterings of approaching disaster. The news of the morning had predisposed us to gloom; the associations now conspired to deepen it; the strange melody which came pouring forth seemed somehow singularly in keeping. There was in my spirit no defined feeling, but a vague unrest,—at once a foreboding of calamity and yearning after peace. It was precisely the sentiment of the song. The singers seemed to feel it; we who listened felt it, and there were eyes whose lids trembled with the coming tears. It was the “Lorelei” of Heine:

I cannot tell what it meaneth,
That I am so sad to-day.

The words, so simple, so infantile almost in sense, and yet with which is marvellously bound such tender feeling! As one repeats the lines they are almost nothing; yet caught within them, like some sad, sweet-throated nightingale within a net, there pants such a pathos! What could have been further away? What cared we then for the Rhine, and the sorceress who sings upon its banks, and the boatman engulfed in the whirlpool? What knew or cared the singers? But something indescribable came pulsing forth to us from out the words, and I felt that somehow it was the appropriate utterance for the mood in which we found ourselves; the thing to hear from the dark-faced youths before us,—

an undefined sorrow, a foreshadowing of danger all unknown and vague! Mighty the poet, I thought, whose verse can come home with such power in lands and among races so far away!

The child of the Jew he was, of the race among the races of the earth possessed of the most intense passionate force, and in him his people found a voice. Now it is a sound of wailing, melancholy and sweet as that heard by the rivers of Babylon when the harps were hung upon the willows,—“a voice in which the tears are trickling as they are never wept with eyes, a sobbing which might move a stone to pity, tones of pain such as could come only from a breast which held shut up within itself all the martyrdom which a tortured race has endured for eighteen hundred years;” now it is a tone pure and lofty as the peal of the silver trumpets before the Holy of Holies in the temple service, when the gems in the high priest’s breastplate flashed with the descending Deity; now a call to strive for freedom, bold and clear as the summons of the Maccabees. But think of the cup that has been pressed to the Jew’s lips! The bitterness has passed into his soul, and utters itself in scorn and poisoned mocking. He cares not what sanctities he insults, nor whether the scoff touches the innocent as well as the guilty. Persecution has brought to pass desperation, which utters itself at length in infernal laughter.

A touching story is told of Heine’s last walk in the Boulevards, from which he went home to the death in life he was doomed to undergo for many years. It was in May, 1848,—a day of revolution.

stepped into
troubled tim
on the grou
ancient gods
stood before
trancing godd
the Venus of
through, almo
staggered bac
and bitter stre
lips of the go
with her won
Heine says hir
selle: "Only
Louvre, and I
the lofty hall
our dear Lady
her feet I lay a
that a stone
Therefore the
me, yet at the



there on a day when disturbance again raged on the streets of Paris. It was the end of August, 1870. In Alsace and Lorraine the armies of France had just been crushed; in the next week was to come Sedan. The streets were full of the tumult of war,—the foot-beat of passing regiments, the clatter of drill, the “Marseillaise.” On the Seine, just before, a band of *ouvriers* threatened to throw us into the river as Prussian spies. In the confusion the shrine of the serene goddess was left vacant, as at that former time. I found it a hushed asylum, the fairest of statues rising from its pedestal, wearing upon its lips its eternal smile. The rounded outlines swelled into their curves of perfect beauty; within the eyes lay the divine calm; on the neck, a symmetry more than mortal; all this, and at the same time the mutilation,—the broken folds of the drapery, the dints made in the marble by barbarian blows, the absent arms. When one stands before the Venus of Milo, it is not unworthy of even so high a moment to call up the image of that suffering man of great genius, shamed from his sneer and restored to his best self in the supernal presence. May we not see in the statue a type of Heine’s genius,—so shorn of strength, so stained and broken, yet, in the ruin, of beauty and power so unparalleled?



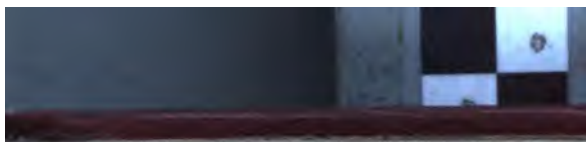
CHAPTER XVII.

THE MODERN ERA.

The story of German literature has been brought down to our own day. The position in which the German nation stands before the world was never prouder than now; their intellectual activity was never greater, their accomplishment never more impressive. As regards polite literature however it is not such a period as that which closed with the death of Göthe; the modern era is one of decay in poetic force.¹ The causes of decay are not far to seek.

The new circumstances of the nation call genius into other fields. The change of political condition, the cementing together of the fragments of German nationality into a mighty empire, gives new outlets for ability. In public life, at length, there are some opportunities for the citizen, though, as yet, not such opportunities as lie open to the freeborn Englishman and American. Again, in manufactures and commerce the possibilities have extended in a marvellous way. Until our own time, German industry has been in every way fettered. Unwise trade regulations strangled export and import;

¹ Vilmar.



commerce languished in the interior of the land, and abroad the wings of enterprise were crippled. The restrictions now are for the most part removed. What merchant more daring in his ventures than the German? What competition more dreaded in the markets of the world than that of the German artisan? Who more bold than the German explorer? There are no finer ships upon the seas than those the German builds and mans. In some East Indian marts he threatens to crowd out Englishman and Hollander. He plants his naval stations in the heart of Oceanica, elbows sharply vegetating Spaniards and Portuguese in Rio and Peru; climbs, in Schlagintweit, the Himalayas; in Barth, tracks the African desert; and presses along with Englishman, American, and Russian in search for the North Pole. Only yesterday the possibilities were opened, but through them power is already marvellously attracted that heretofore has been spent at the desk and in the library.

Positive science, in the third place, has come in our time to absorb in an extraordinary degree enthusiasm and energy. The conquest of force and matter never before went forward so triumphantly. When achievement is so dazzling, what wonder that ambitious youths enlist for such campaigns, and crowd laboratory, assay-room, and the cabinet of the naturalist! The idealism which was so captivating seventy years ago is forsaken, and the few representatives of a spiritual philosophy must fight hard to maintain their ground against Büchner, Karl Vogt, and the other advocates of materialism.

One of the most noted of modern literary critics utters himself as follows: "It would be an immense mistake to imagine that a trace remains of the elements that went to form the picture some writers have given to the world of us. The idealism, the dreaminess, the moonshine, have had their day. We have become strict realists. The questions that occupy us in the morning, which perplex us at nightfall, are business questions. All in art and literature that savored of idealism, dreaminess, and moonshine has gone. We have become accustomed to deal better than we used to with realities, and to describe things as they are. I had a conversation the other day with one of our best painters, in which he told me in the most animated manner that he had found a splendid subject for a picture; that he had now spent twelve months in preparatory studies, and that he should give the next few years of his life exclusively to the work. Although myself a tolerably thorough-going realist, I at once supposed he had chosen some famous event in the world's history. What was my astonishment when he told me that the subject was an iron-foundry!"¹

In our field, then, the famous men have vanished, and none of equal significance have arisen to take their places. The great Schiller hardly belongs to the present century. Almost half a century has passed since the death of the greater Göthe. Romanticism too has passed almost utterly away, present only in our heavens as a bank of vapor hangs on the

¹ Julian Schmidt, in *London Athenæum*, May 18, 1872.

far horizon, from which the earth is sweeping,—shapeless, indefinite, full of lovely tints, but no longer right at hand to dazzle and obscure. The few great men in whom the brilliant past prolonged itself into the present are one by one dropping away. The grave has just closed over the poets Freiligrath and Simrock, and the story-teller, Hans Christian Andersen. On the scene we now behold figures not great, though often respectable,—poets like Jordan, dramatists like Gustav Freytag, story-tellers like Auerbach, Spielhagen, the prolific Mühlbach, and Paul Heyse. The force that in another time might have written a great lyric, guides an iron steamship or founds a trading-house in Hong Kong or Valparaiso. To discover the sources of the Nile, or a practicable path through the Arctic Ocean seems a grander thing than to write “Iphigenia” or “Wallenstein;” or if men of power remain at home among books, they are more likely to undertake a sober history than an epic, a treatise upon evolution or the action of molecules than a romantic tale.

Still, that writer would do injustice to many persons of high talent and noble industry who should represent the German literature of our time as at all insignificant. I was so fortunate as to make my pilgrimage when America had as a representative at Berlin a scholar who, aside from diplomatic ability, won respect in that country of scholars by the best literary gifts and acquirements, the historian Bancroft. Mr. Bancroft was always ready to befriend the student, however humble, and introduced through

him, I was fortunate enough to enjoy interviews with some remarkable men.

Before sketching certain eminent living characters, however, let me speak of two men of genius whose long careers were full of honorable, useful industry, and who link, in a way convenient for our purpose, the present with the past.

I take down a book from its shelf and find in the beginning this affectionate note, by way of preface:

“Dear Wilhelm: When thou last winter wert so sick, I was forced to think that thy faithful eyes would perhaps never again fall upon this book. I sat at thy table, in thy chair, and beheld with indescribable grief with what unerring taste and judgment thou hadst read and arranged the first volumes of my work. It seemed to me that I had written it only for thee, and that if thou wert taken from me I could not possibly finish it. God’s grace has prevailed, and left thee with us; therefore the book belongs of right to thee.” * * * “At least, when thou readest me, who knowest my whole capacity,—what strength it has, and where it fails,—I am better pleased than when a hundred others read me, who perhaps now and then do not understand me, or to whom my labor is perhaps an indifferent matter. But thou hast the most unwavering sympathy, not only with the subject, but with me. In brotherly love mayest thou be satisfied with every thing!”

The note is the preface to the third volume of a great “German Grammar,”—a work which lies at the foundation of the science of historic grammar,—a sweet expression of brotherly love lying in the

midst of the dry linguistic detail, like a fragrant flower that has fallen in and been pressed within the ponderous covers. It lets us at once into the lives of two of the most beautiful characters of literary history,—Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm. They were brothers not far apart in the cradle, not far apart in death; lying now side by side in graves precisely similar, as I saw them in a quiet church-yard, a lovely rose-bush scattering petals impartially on the turf above both, and solid twin stones at their heads, meant to endure, apparently, as long as their fame. For the most part their labor was performed in common,—Jakob, the abler, leading the way, but Wilhelm, as the note indicates, always at hand to help with admirable judgment and fidelity.

The work of the brothers Grimm must be regarded as perhaps the most marvellous work of the marvellous German erudition. Aside from the “German Grammar,” they are the projectors of the great dictionary, which they also partially executed, in which not only the present meaning, but the thorough history of the words of the German language is to be given, following the changing forms and shadings in signification through all the centuries.

Best of all, perhaps, they made the folk-lore of the Teutonic race a subject of scientific study, showing that in many cases the nursery-tale which delights the little child to-day, traced back through a thousand phases, has come down from primeval times. In every old land there blooms in the pop-

ular heart the Märchen. They are a wild growth, full often of beauty and perfume. Within the present century this artless Flora has found a Linnaeus to subject it to scientific study, in Jakob Grimm. As the botanist studies stamen, petal, and pistil, so the brothers Grimm—for Wilhelm was here, as always, the helper—study and compare the giant and the dwarf, the enchanted castle and magic wand, the wicked step-mother, the heroic younger son, the robber-cave, each circumstance and feature, every whiff of aroma and line of tinting in the Märchen, all with scientific purpose. As a first result the Grimms dared to propound the striking theory that the genuine Märchen were nothing more nor less than the remains of the great legends of the old religious faiths, softened down, but still living in the souls of the people. “How much yet,” exclaimed Niebuhr, “of the old Roman mythology may live in the Märchen, if only some dweller among the homes of the peasants of the Appenines could investigate!” In like manner the Grimms and their followers would have us believe that the phantoms of the mighty Norse gods still haunt the hearth among the races of the Teutonic stock. It has even been said that we must give up William Tell, perhaps William Wallace, as flesh and blood heroes; and that Robin Hood is a purely mythical being, no other than the God Odin, who, although the faith of which he was the central figure has been so long displaced, yet refuses to be exorcised from the popular mind.

Balder, the beautiful, is dead, is dead,

sings the Swedish poet Tegner, after the old saga ; and in like manner with Balder, we have believed that Odin, and Thor, and Freya had also passed away. These students would have us believe that they are not dead ; or, if so, that their ghosts refuse to be laid. The grim circumstance that attended them in their old preëminence has been laid aside ; but often, in gentle, indeed in blithe and merry guise, they continue to appear to the children of the great races whose forefathers worshipped them. It is hard to have our dearest heroes fade away into mist ; but perhaps, after all, we have a more than adequate recompense in the wonderful grandeur of the thought that these rough hands of the old gods refuse to become decrepit through time, or to be beaten off by culture ; that they reach round the new altars that have crowded out their own simple fanes, and across the widest oceans, to the homes of the farthest wanderers, clasping still the hearts of the children whose wild sires rendered them solemn worship.

The brothers Grimm laid under obligation perhaps a wider public than authors have ever before addressed,—the babe almost in his cradle, the youth struggling with the rudiments of scholarship, the grayest scholar and thinker. There is not now living a better representative of the writers, so many of whom have been considered as we have traced the course of German literature,—enthusiasts in poetry, history, and criticism, and remarkable in all, the class the illustrious types of which

are the greatest men, Lessing, Göthe, Schiller, and Heine, — than Hermann Grimm, the son of Wilhelm. At twenty-five he attracted to himself notice by his drama of "Demetrius," a work soon followed by a series of well-written romances. Later came the "Life of Michael Angelo," a book almost as famous in England and America as Germany; various critical papers upon subjects of art and literature, noteworthy among which is one upon the Venus of Milo; and lastly, a series of lectures upon Göthe, given in the University of Berlin, a portrayal whose constant tone of eulogy is somewhat fatiguing, but a most vivid, and, on the whole, trustworthy picture of Germany's greatest mind. I found him in his study, which was filled with books and objects of art, a vigorous man in his best years, with the face and courteous polish of a man of the highest refinement. He was interested in America, and knew well American books, having in particular an admiration for Emerson, several of whose essays he had translated, doing much also in other ways to make him known in Germany.

As I sat with Hermann Grimm his brother entered the room. It was thrilling to be with the brothers Grimm of to-day, so nearly connected with the brothers Grimm of great fame. I saw the relics consecrated by the use of the father and the greater uncle, — the thumbed volumes worn and dog-eared in the course of their investigations, written thick in the margin with notes in their own writing.

But especially fine was it to see a photograph of



the two old men, who labored so long together and whose fame is so inseparably linked, sitting in brotherly nearness, with faces full of intellectual strength, and yet with the sweetness and innocence of children. "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths were they not divided."

On another day I rung at a door whose modest plate bore the name Leopold von Ranke. He is called the type and leader of the modern school of German historians,—somewhat too reactionary in his views to please the friends of freedom, but possessing a skill of presentment which, among the writers of the present day, is quite unmatched. He has hitherto been best known to English readers for his history of the Popes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a work long ago translated and most widely circulated. As historiographer of the kingdom of Prussia he has written many volumes relating to that country; he has written others concerning Southern Germany and the south of Europe. Latterly he has appeared in the field of English history, treating an important field with all possible thoroughness and judgment. I was promptly admitted to an unpretending parlor, lined with well-filled bookcases. Presently Von Ranke came forward from an adjoining room, wrapped in a long dressing-gown,—a man of seventy-five, a short, bent figure, with high shoulders, but with a fresh-hued, bright face and cheerful eye. He addressed me at once in English, complimenting Mr. Bancroft, and plied me straightway with sharp questions about America. His mind was nimble and keen,—evi-

dently quite unbroken. He is still living and laborious, having accomplished since I saw him some of his best work.

If Von Ranke has a rival as the leader of modern German historians, it is Theodor Mommsen, historian of Rome,—in that direction, certainly, the first living man. The translation of his great history every intelligent reader of English has seen,—a mighty construction of learning and acuteness. The famous Dane, Niebuhr, led the way in exercising sharp discrimination in the field of ancient history, separating the fabulous and mythical from the true. Mommsen is his worthy disciple, presenting however the results he reaches with far more skill and grace than his master. Mommsen began life as a jurist, and his training and knowledge in that direction lend to his history certain important excellences; perhaps too it is due to this that he is too much inclined to play the advocate in the treatment of the heroes of his tale. He has also gathered, with remarkable sagacity, and for the first time used, important scraps of history derived from monumental inscriptions. Mommsen too I found in his study. He came forward from his books and manuscripts to greet the stranger,—a thin figure, hardly past fifty, and yet bent as with the weight of great erudition; a pale cheek, a dark eye, not quenched at all by study, a profusion of dark hair, which was turning gray, over an intellectual head. His voice seemed thin and weak, though under excitement, I was told, it became strong enough. His whole appearance spoke of constant toil and se-



clusion, and one could see what it costs to become great in his direction. He received me somewhat stiffly, but politely. He too paid Bancroft a high compliment, saying that it was not often that men so worthy and scholarly were found in diplomatic positions. As a historian he considered him most fortunate in his subject, having a field for the most part unoccupied. He spoke cordially of America, and when I hinted at some of our shortcomings, said, hopefully, that the future belonged to us, and all would come right in time. In the midst of our talk, three pretty children, the oldest perhaps six, came laughing and dancing into the room to bid their father good-night. He kissed them with pride and pleasure, the light in his fine eyes becoming playful. While the sunbeam was shining I left the student's dusty den, with its disordered piles of books, its heaps of manuscript, its casts and plates of Roman antiques.

There is a class of men which in our time has become wonderfully extended and influential, to discuss which does not properly belong to my topic. This class however has absorbed much power which in another age than ours would have undoubtedly gone to literature, and has still a close relation with it,—I mean the votaries of physical science. I may, at any rate, describe some of their representatives. “You must see Bunsen and Kirchhoff,” said a friend to me, soon after my arrival at Heidelberg. I had long known the names as the most famous ones connected with what is perhaps the most famous scien-

tific discovery of our time, — spectral analysis, — by means of which matter can be dissected as never before, yielding new elements, what have until now been considered as ultimates, showing that they admit of still further subdivision. More wonderful still, spectral analysis is the process by means of which the observer becomes even sublimely armed, penetrating space even to the sun, to the distant fixed stars, wresting from them the secret of their substance.

In Bunsen's lecture-room, accordingly, one morning I found myself among a crowd of young chemists, waiting with their note-books on the amphitheatre of seats. A long table at the farther end of the room was covered with the apparatus for a chemical lecture, here and there among the retorts and beakers the quivering, almost colorless, flames of the Bunsen burners, ready to do service for their inventor. A spectroscope lay at one side, its handsome prisms just visible; for aught I know there were still more discoveries of the great teacher, which another would have recognized. Punctually at the hour Bunsen entered, — a tall, commanding figure, a man of nearly sixty, simply dressed, his head surmounted by a skull-cap. There was no sound in the room but the lecturer's quiet voice, and now and then a scratch of the pen, as the large company of reverent young men bent to their notes. They were indeed reverent. Bunsen has never been married; he sleeps and lives among his crucibles, — his science his wife, his pupils his children; and I heard strange stories, which in another time would have



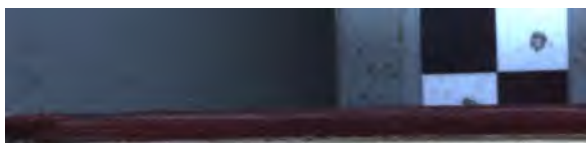
gone far to carry him to the stake as a wizard, that the flesh of his hands had become as asbestos from the handling of flames and acids

I found Kirchoff a much younger man, and still younger in appearance than reality. As he stepped out—prompt to the minute—before the waiting, crowded benches of his lecture-room, and with no preface but a quick, formal bow, plunged into the midst of the abstrusities of physics, he seemed scarcely older than the students he addressed. Slight and pale, with a modesty that flushed his cheek suddenly sometimes, he went on with an even, unhesitating utterance, now and then turning to the black-board to draw, with rapid hand, a diagram, or a series of algebraic symbols. He had lived long enough to make himself, in his direction, one of the most famous men of the world, and the great universities were contending for the honor of counting him in their faculties.

Walking one day through a quiet street, I came upon a man who was going slowly and thoughtfully in the opposite direction, toward a university building. His appearance was striking. He was finely formed, and had a military carriage; his well-shaped head sat upon a muscular neck, and his eye glanced dark and piercing, as he looked at me in passing. He seemed the ideal of bodily and intellectual vigor, and I followed him with my eyes till he disappeared within the building before us. It was Helmholtz, who, Tyndall says, was described to him as the brightest mind of Germany,—certainly an intellect of the first order, an investigator most persistent

and successful in the obscurest departments of physics and physiology. It is an era in one's life to see such a man in his lecture-hall, standing with something of military precision before his silent class, quiet and fluent in his unrivalled mastery of his topics.

With these personal sketches the story of German literature is concluded. Let us allow ourselves a brief glance toward the future. Is German literature to preserve its eminence? If it depends upon thorough mental training, what more can be done? There is scarcely to be found in all Germany a human being, not imbecile or a very young child, who cannot read and write. An inexorable law forces every child into school until he gains a training tolerably complete; and to those who seek an elaborate education, such advantages are open as are afforded nowhere else in the world. I went one day into a "Volk-schule" — school for the children of the people, — a roomy, well-arranged structure, standing back from the street in a quiet court by itself, with rooms all well filled. It was a school for boys, sons of operatives in factories, which abounded in the neighborhood; from ten to fourteen they were, prompt and promising, well alive in all their work. Looking out through a window into a court attached to the school-building, I saw the martial feature which pervades all Prussian life. The teacher of gymnastics was leading a great troop of boys through a series of half-military evolutions, fitted to train them to take kindly by and by to the stern

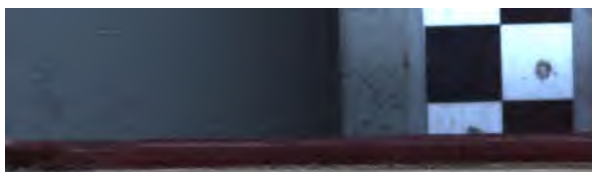


drilling which lay before them all when they had fairly got their growth.

The most interesting of the German schools are the "Gymnasien," the nurseries of the best intellect of the country. I attended an exercise in Latin of the "Prima," or highest class. Fifty youths of eighteen sat on plain benches, in a room bare of every thing but the indispensable furniture. They rose as the teacher entered, then sitting, sang a choral in concert, with powerful voices. The drill that followed was admirable; so too in an adjoining room, where the boys were reading Homer; and in another, where an enthusiastic teacher lectured upon a subject of natural history. Each master was competent, and teaching in the direction in which he was strongest, the youths eager, respectful, and finely trained. Only here again was the martial feature, in a connection which seemed at first irreverent; after all it was thoroughly Prussian, and deserved to be looked upon as a comical incongruity rather than gravely blamed. A row of cheap pictures hung side by side upon the wall. First, Luther, the rougher characteristics of the well-known portrait somewhat exaggerated. The shoulders were even larger than common. The bony buttresses over the eyes too, as they rose above the strong lower face, were emphasized, looking truly as if, if tongue and pen failed to make a way, the shoulders could push one, and if worse came to worst, the head would butt one. Next to Luther was a head of Christ; then, in the same line, with nothing in the position or quality of the pictures to indicate that the subjects were any

less esteemed, a row of royal personages, whose military trappings were made particularly plain. It was all characteristic enough. The Reformer's figure stood for the stalwart Protestantism of the German character, still living and militant in a way hard for us to imagine; the portraits of the royal soldiers, for its combative loyalty, ready to meet any thing for the Fatherland; the head of Christ, for the zealous faith which, however it may have cooled away among some classes of the people, is still intense in others.

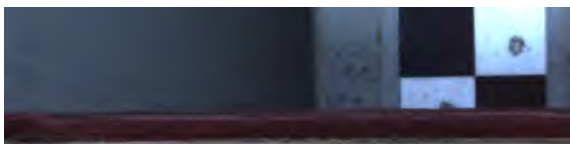
Crowning the schools in the educational system come the famous universities. In the best of these there is no branch of human knowledge without its teacher. One can study Egyptian hieroglyphics or the Assyrian arrow-head inscriptions. A new pimple can hardly break out on the blotched face of the moon without a lecture from a professor next day to explain the theory of its development. The poor earthquakes are hardly left to shake in peace an out-of-the-way strip of South American coast or Calabrian plain but a German professor will violate their privacy, undertake to see whence they come and whither they go, and even try to predict when they will go to shaking again. The discipline is of the easiest sort. The student selects his lectures, then goes day by day to the plain lecture-rooms, taking notes diligently at benches which preceding generations have whittled well, where he too will carve his own name, and perhaps the name of the dear girl he adores; for Yankee boys have no monopoly of the jack-knife. If at the end, however,



he presents himself for examination, his stock of knowledge is sifted well ; and if he departs with a degree, has a fair title to be considered a learned man. It is very fine, the preliminary training being what it is. It would be useless, or worse than useless, without the indispensable pedestal upon which the statue stands. Into the university too Mars thrusts himself, showing his presence most plainly perhaps in the duelling habits of the students.

To crown all, schools and universities are supplemented in many places by crowded libraries, and by an instrumentality of which as yet, in America, we have almost nothing, but which is most effective toward a noble culture,— the historical museum. For a specimen, that at Berlin is a vast collection where one may study the rise and progress of civilization in every race of past ages that has had a history, and the present condition of perhaps every people, civilized or wild, under the sun. In one great hall you are among the satin garments and lacquered furniture of China ; in another it is the seal-skin work of the Esquimaux, stitched with sinew. Now you sit in a Tartar tent ; now among the war-clubs, the conch-shell trumpets, the drums covered with human skin of the Polynesians. Here it is the feathery finery of the Caribs ; here the idols and trinkets of the negroes of Soudan. There too, in still other halls, is the history of our own race : the maces with which the primeval Teutons fought, the torcs of twisted gold they wore about their necks, the sacrificial knives that slew the victims upon the altar of Odin. So too what our fathers afterwards

carved and spun, moulded, cast, and portrayed, until the task of life was taken up by us. Again the visitor stands within the fac-simile of a temple on the banks of the Nile. On the walls and lotus-shaped columns are processions of dark figures, at the loom, at the work of irrigation, marching as soldiers, or as mourners at a funeral, — exact copies of original delineations. Real, however, are sphinx and obelisk, the coffins of kings, mummies of priest and princess, the fabrics they wove, the scrolls they engrossed, the tombs in which they were buried. In another section you are in Assyria, with the alabaster lions and plumed genii of the men of Nineveh and Babylon. Upon the walls is thrown all the splendor of the palaces of Nebuchadnezzar; the captives building temples, the chivalry sacking cities, the princes upon their thrones. Here too is Etruria, revealed in her sculptures and painted vases; and here too the whole story of Greece. Passing through those wonderful halls, you review a thousand years and more, almost from the epoch of Cadmus, through the vicissitudes of empire and servitude, until Constantinople is sacked by the Turks. The rude Pelasgic altar, the sculptured god of Praxiteles, then down through the ages of decay to the ugly painting of the Byzantine monk in the Dark Ages. So too the whole story of Rome: the long heave of the wave, until it becomes crested with the might and beauty of the Augustan age; the sad subsidence thence to Goth and Hun. There is architecture which the Tarquins saw; statues of the great consuls of the republic; the



luxury of the later empire. You see it not only in models, but in actual relics. One's blood thrills when he stands before a statue of Julius Cæsar, whose sculptor, it is reasonable to believe, wrought from the life. It is broken and discolored as it came from the Italian ruin where it had lain since the barbarian raids. But the grace has not left the toga, folded across the breast, nor is the fine Roman majesty gone from the head and face, — a head small, but high, with a full and ample brow, a nose with the true eagle curve, and thin, firm lips, formed to command; a statue most subduing in its simple dignity, and pathetic in its partial ruin.

Verily if the appliances of the broadest and deepest possible culture are the conditions of a great literature, what land so full of promise? But let us not hastily decide. At the beginning of the chapter, causes were mentioned which interfere at present with the upspringing of a great literature; the same causes are likely to act more strongly in the future. Standing on the university steps at Berlin, looking across the broad "Unter den Linden," it was once, and perhaps is still, an every-day sight to behold, towering at one of the lower windows of the palace opposite, an erect, martial figure of imposing height, the red facings of a handsome uniform buttoned across a massive chest, a face expressive of benevolence and force, set off by a heavy, gray mustache, and hair whitened by nearly eighty winters. The crowd passing on the sidewalk bows respectfully, the figure at the window in-

clining in response in stately courtesy. So stands the old Kaiser Wilhelm, such a potentate as Germany has not seen for six hundred years, himself the living type of one of the most important changes of modern history,—the unification of Germany. It is a proud and perilous preëminence, and just as magnificent is the eminence before the world of the land which he rules. And what shall be said of this as bearing upon the question in hand? This melting away of barriers—accompanied as it is by a higher degree of freedom for the German citizen, by a national life in every way more dignified and stimulating—brings an alleviation of burdens and a general bettering of circumstances. Fields open for the German in every direction, so that he may vie on equal terms with the master-races of the world, in spinning and casting, in buying and selling, in ploughing the sea and struggling for a foothold in far regions. It will not stimulate, but abate, the literary energy whose pressure has been so marvellous.

Said a shrewd German once, a citizen of our own country, at a convention of American teachers, when a disparaging comparison was made between American and German universities: “German universities have become great because the land has been oppressed. The trammelled people, for whom the outlets of trade, politics, manufacture, have been in past times so nearly blocked, were forced to spend energy in somewhat far-away scholarship. Hence, largely, the remarkable achievement.” I believe the remark is wise, and admits of more

extended application. Not alone the erudition, but the splendid literary and philosophical development, would have failed, had there been elsewhere a sphere for power. Take Fichte; it is reasonable to say that he would not have been satisfied to spend his life in ideal dreamings,—he who, when opportunity offered, could talk with such direct practical eloquence to the German nation,—if in his day there had been a chance for a man of the people among German statesmen. Take Schiller,—less a poet than a magnificent preacher and teacher; if he could have uttered himself unconstrainedly as an orator, he would have written fewer books. Or the grand Lessing,—so full of ideas about tolerance, the alleviating of human misery, the breaking of chains in State and Church; if he could have spoken his divine passion directly, how he might have led the people! In his bondage he could only utter furtive criticism and indirect scorn of existing things, in “*Minna von Barnhelm*,” “*Emilia Gallotti*,” and the “*Nathan*,” masterpieces forever precious; but untrammelled, we can imagine that his masterpieces would have been of a different sort. In the days of tyranny, poetry, scholarship, philosophy were almost the German’s only outlet. At the present time they are some among a multitude of outlets through which power can pour itself. What keeps America from greatness in these quiet fields? The diversion of power into politics and business. Hence the world calls to us in vain for a great poem,—in vain for a work of the highest erudition; and those who strive to rear universities

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CHAPTER XVIII.

GERMAN STYLE.

At the present day no foreign literature is affecting us so powerfully as that of Germany. It is worthy to exercise such an influence. There is no department in human effort in which the Germans are not abreast with the foremost, and in some directions they are leaders, of the world. As scholars, in several of the fine arts, above all as philosophical thinkers, their authority is surpassing. But great as have been the benefits coming to us through their influence, these have not been unalloyed.

“Persius,” says old Cowley, “who, you use to say, you do not know whether he be a good poet or not, because you do not *understand* him, and whom therefore I say I know *not* to be a good poet.”¹ Shall we accept as truth to-day this doctrine, which comes to us from the seventeenth century? Are writers of poetry, as well as prose, to be set down as not good if we cannot understand them? Yes; the first excellence of expression is for a writer or speaker to make his meaning clear.

It is impossible however to deny that a certain

¹ Essay on Procrastination.

effectiveness may come from obscurity. The bug-bear which in the daytime when clearly seen, we treat with indifference, becomes, when partly hidden by the night, a thing of terror. Beauty, which makes little impression when fully revealed, becomes entrancing if partially veiled. Give the imagination its opportunity, and it will conceive as existing behind the curtain a hideousness of danger, or a perfection of charm, far beyond what is really there. In the same way, taking every thing unknown for something magnificent, according to Tacitus in the "Agricola," we often credit with undue power and value unintelligible words.

It is not often however that a writer dares to step forth openly in defence of obscurity. One such defence I know, and only one; very naturally, it is by Carlyle. "It has in many cases its own appropriateness. Certainly, in all matters of business or science, in all expositions of fact or argument, clearness and ready comprehensibility are a great, often an indispensable, object. Science and poetry, having separate purposes, may have each its several law. One degree of light the artist may find will become one delineation, quite a different degree of light another. The face of Agamemnon was not painted, but hidden, in the old picture; the veiled figure at Sais was the most impressive in the temple. This style of composition has often a singular charm. The reader is kept on the alert, ever conscious of his own active coöperation. Light breaks on him, and clearer vision by degrees, till at last the whole lovely shape comes forth, definite, it may be, and

bright with heavenly radiance, or fading on this side and that into vague, expressive mystery. We love it the more for the labor it has given us; we almost feel as if we ourselves had assisted at its creation."¹

After enunciating his theory in the words just quoted, Carlyle proceeded to put it into practice; for he wrote, soon after, "*Sartor Resartus*," in which his meaning appears through a vapor burning with blinding simile, thick with indefinite statement and uncouth verbiage, as, according to one astronomical theory, we dimly see the substantial body of the sun through its ever-tossing, wide-extending atmosphere of fire. Never has the effectiveness of obscurity been better illustrated. The commonplaces of morality, indistinctly seen, set off grotesquely or beautifully within the glowing, picturesque envelope, gained an impressiveness which for the world they could not have had in an unclouded presentment.

Carlyle's doctrine is nevertheless false, and the example bad. It is certainly right to say that whoever has thoughts to express should express them with clearness. No authority has declared this so absolutely and satisfactorily as Herbert Spencer, in his essay on the "*Philosophy of Style*." "Always," he says, "economize the attention of your recipient, your hearer or reader, whether you are prose writer or poet." From the obligation of a clear presentation no one who has ideas to ex-

¹ *Essay on the Helena of Göthe.*

press is exempt. Unqualified as this doctrine is, we may take it as the only one to be accepted by honest men.

That men may be so easily imposed upon by what they understand indistinctly is a weakness of human nature. Said the Latin poet Lucretius: "Foolish men admire, and love the more, all things which they see hiding away behind obscurities of style. They consider true what touches the ears in a finely-sounding manner and is pleasantly set off."¹

The folly of which Lucretius speaks is a species from which none of us are free. Often do men, especially if the education has not been thorough, treat lightly the intelligible man, considering him to be shallow. Blinded however by obscurities, we credit them with a weight of hidden meaning they do not at all possess. Vanity enforces credulity. Unwilling to confess ourselves mystified, and imagining that our neighbor sees clearly, we insincerely pretend to have light, and hastily embrace the shadow for substance.

To take advantage of this weakness of human nature is to treat men unfairly. The concealing the face of Agamemnon, and the veiling the statue at Sais, in order to enhance the effect,—to recur to Carlyle's illustration,—was trickery, in place in a theatrical presentation; for the stage, among human

¹ Omnia enim stolidi magis admirantur, amant que
Inversis quae sub verbis latitantia cernunt.
Veraque constituunt quae belle tangere possunt
Auris, et lepidè quae sunt fucata sonore.

— De Rerum Natura. l. 641, etc.



institutions, is privileged to deceive ; but deserving to be rejected in all serious and honest life. He who is careless about a clear presentation in expressing his thoughts has not done his duty. The writer who is deliberately and artfully obscure, for the purpose of taking advantage of the weakness of human nature, makes use of a trick ; his end may be good, but he has employed trickery nevertheless. The seeking thus to heighten the effect of a thought by investing it in gloom is charlatan-ism, — a thing in the end only harmful, though temporarily it may seem to serve a good purpose.

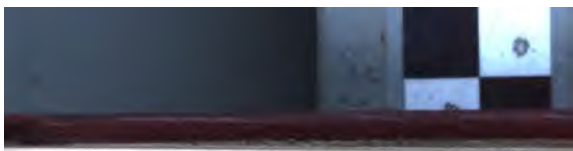
If the attempt is made to trace to their sources the kinds of obscurity which embarrass us most at the present day, we must undoubtedly go to the Germans. It was through them Carlyle went astray. Let no one refuse admiration to their intellectual achievement. Among the grandest of the literatures of the world, perhaps the grandest, is that of Germany ; but parts of it are as densely wrapped in mist as a Scotch November morning.

In general we may say that the German style is less effective as an instrument of clear expression than the English, and far less effective than the French. The German style is very “periodic,” — that is, reserves the meaning in its clauses and sentences until the end is reached. In subordinate clauses the verb is not given until the end ; in principal clauses, if the verb have a separable prefix, as is very frequently the case, the prefix, an essential part of the word, must generally be thrown to the

end, while the verb remains near the beginning. In a large proportion of German sentences the meaning remains in suspension through clause after clause, until the attention breaks down in the effort to carry the load. Let me illustrate. I take up the German book which lies nearest at hand, and opening at random, hit upon a sentence which I translate as literally as I can, preserving the order of the words.

“After that already in these years of the sixteenth century, poetry gradually begins to die away, especially the clear popular voices of the same, one after the other, to become silent commence, and out of the free, fresh, natural folk-song even a strained, forced-gayety-representing, and already-with-all-kinds-of learned-frippery-bordered ‘social song’ (as Hoffmann von Fallersleben this later folk-song not unrightly named has) come to pass had, — became, at the end of the sixteenth century, the victory which erudition (classical philology, learned theology, learned jurisprudence), over every thing which yet German named be might, gained had, in its full completeness, and in all its disastrous consequences on all departments of German life, and most strikingly upon the department of German poetry, manifest.”¹

¹ “Nachdem schon in diesen Jahren des 16. Jahrhunderts die Poesie allgemach anfängt zu erlöschen, zumal die lauten volksmässigen Stimmen derselben eine nach der andern zu verstummen beginnen, und aus dem freien, frischen, natürlichen Volkaliede sogar ein gemachtes, erzwungene Lustigkeit darstellendes und schon mit allerlei gelehrtem Kräuselwerk verbrämtes Gesellschaftslied (wie Hoffmann von Fallersleben dieses spätere Volkslied nicht unrichtig benannt



This passage is not exceptionally difficult. Its author, while perhaps not famous as a stylist, has at the same time a most respectable position among modern German writers. It may be considered fairly representative, as a specimen of German prose. Let us test it by the canon of Herbert Spencer. Is the thought expressed in such a way that the "attention of the recipient is economized?" It is out of the question for the most careful reader—the man of quickest apprehension and greatest power of concentration—to possess himself thoroughly of the contents of the passage without several careful readings. The sentence is periodic,—gives no meaning until we reach its last word; all must be in doubt in the mind of the reader until "manifest" is reached. The protasis, with its long subordinate clauses, ending with "come to pass had," is very complicated; its unity is broken by the parenthesis; the verbs and adjectives are preceded by what modifies them, so that we have suspensions of meaning within suspensions. The apodosis, introduced by "became," is not less involved. One relative clause depends upon another relative clause; only study enables us to say to what we must refer the adverbial and adjective elements; most puzzling of all is the principal

hat) geworden war, trat am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts der Sieg, den die Gelehrsamkeit—die klassische Philologie, die gelehrte Theologie, die gelehrte Jurisprudenz—über alles, was noch deutsch genannt werden mochte, davon getragen hatte, in seiner ganzen Vollständigkeit, und in allen seinen unheilvollen Folgen auf allen Gebieten des deutschen Lebens, und am auffallendsten auf dem Gebiete der deutschen Poesie an den Tag."—Vilmar, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, edition of 1868, p. 322. Marburg and Leipsig.

verb. In the German it is "trat an den Tag." I have translated it "became manifest;" the one word "appeared" would not be an unfair rendering; the parts of the verb are separated by a gap of six lines, and some ingenuity is required to see that they actually belong together. Very careful thought, then, must be given to the disentangling of the words; since it has been impossible in the reading to "economize the attention," the *contents* of the passage at last are caught and held with a grasp which the previous effort has jaded.

It may be said, "This is unfair. The construction which seems difficult to the English-speaking man would be easy to a German. If a passage of English prose were rendered into German, with a corresponding preservation of the idiom of the original, would not the German find that forced and exhausting which to the English-speaking man is simple?" Of course, the German finds *less* difficulty with his writers than we do; but the human mind is not one thing in England and America and another thing in the heart of Europe. It cannot be otherwise than that the immense periods, the long "suspensions" which come from other causes, the many involutions, should exhaust attention, even in the case of minds which handle them most readily. Herbert Spencer, in condemning such a way of writing, bases his criticism, not upon what is expedient for those who use his own language, but upon a universal principle.¹ What De Quincey so finely says in the

¹ Essay on Style.



following passage is applicable, not simply to us, but always and everywhere: "Those who are not accustomed to watch the effects of composition upon the feelings, or have had little experience in voluminous reading, pursued for weeks, would scarcely imagine how much of downright physical exhaustion is produced by what is technically called the *periodic* style of writing; it is not the length," * * * "the paralytic flux of words; it is not even the cumbrous involution of parts within parts, separately considered, that bears so heavily upon the attention. It is the suspense, the holding on of the mind until the apodosis, or coming round of the sentence, commences,—this it is which wears out the faculty of attention. A sentence, for example, begins with a series of *ifs*; perhaps a dozen lines are occupied with expanding the conditions under which something is affirmed or denied. Here you cannot dismiss and have done with the ideas as you go along; all is hypothetic; all is suspended in the air. The conditions are not fully understood until you are acquainted with the dependency; you must give a separate attention to each clause of this complex hypothesis, and yet having done *that* by a painful effort, you have done nothing at all; for you must exercise a reacting attention through the corresponding latter section in order to follow out its relations to all parts of the hypothesis which sustains it." * * *

"A monster period is a vast arch which, not receiving its key-stone, not being locked into self-supporting cohesion until you nearly reach its close, imposes of necessity upon the unhappy reader all the

onus of its ponderous weight, through the main process of its construction.”¹

The kind of obscurity which has just been considered lies in the genius of the language; the individual writer falls into it unwittingly. It has sometimes been the case however that writers have shown wilful carelessness, or indeed sought to be indistinct for a purpose. If we are to trust their own critics, in no other nation so much as among the Germans have scholarly men been so afflicted with that vanity of the learned which leads to making a display of acquirement for the sake of admiration, investing what is simple in needless complications, or sometimes imposing upon the world with a great show when there is nothing at all behind,—in a word, pedantry. The history of the German universities is in some ways a discreditable one. Going back to the sixteenth century, the wholesome, honest Luther sweat, as he says, blood and water to make himself intelligible to the simplest of the people, his effort being rewarded by such an acceptance on the part of the people as perhaps no other man has ever gained. Scarcely was he gone when his successors, the leaders of the world of thought, particularly in the universities, forgot his example, wrapped their utterances in an unknown tongue, and, avoiding living questions, went to threshing the straw of useless dogmas and scholastic points. It is a species of folly that was repeated again and again, and has not yet disappeared.

¹ Essay on Style.



A foreigner would hardly dare to use language as severe as that employed by Germans themselves. Says Max Müller: "The pedantic display of learning, the disregard of the real wants of the people, the contempt of all knowledge which does not wear the academic garb, show the same foible, the same conceit, the same spirit of caste, among those who from the sixteenth century to the present day have occupied the most prominent rank in the society of Germany. Professorial knight-errantry still waits for its Cervantes. Nowhere have so many wind-mills been fought, and so many real enemies left unhurt, as in Germany. The learned men have forgotten that they and their learning, their universities and their libraries, were for the benefit of the people. It was considered more respectable to teach in Latin. Luther was sneered at because of his little German tracts, which any village clerk might have written. All this might look very learned and professorial and imposing, but it separated the scholars from the people at large, and blighted the prospects of Germany. When to speak Latin and amass a vague and vast information was more creditable than to digest and use it, Luther's work was undone."¹

A study of the history of German scholarship will show that Max Müller's severity towards his countrymen is just. When the fashion for using Latin had gone by, many great German writers, even when employing their own tongue have been scarcely

¹ Sketch of German Literature.

more intelligible. There has often been blameworthy carelessness, or indeed deliberate choosing of the obscure rather than the plain, as if with the purpose of mystifying. The writer desires to speak of German philosophy with great respect, but in the present connection it is to be mentioned as exercising a certain bad influence. It has affected style most unfortunately. So high an authority as Göthe declares:¹ "On the whole, philosophic speculation has been a hindrance to the Germans, often bringing into their style an element of the senseless and incomprehensible. The more they have given themselves to certain philosophical schools the worse they write."

"Very destructive," says Kurz, "upon the development of prose was the influence of the philosophers." The philosophical jargon, which was destined to deform the German tongue so sadly, appeared with Kant. It is a subject for lamentation that Kant did not make the effort to give his ideas a clear form. The philosopher himself confesses, in a letter to Mendelssohn: "The product of twelve years of reflection I set down in four or five months, in greatest haste, with much attention to the contents to be sure, but with little care about making it easy of comprehension to the reader." Zelter, a friend of Göthe, in a letter to the poet, gives rather an amusing illustration of the difficulties of the style of Kant, even to a cultivated German. The philosopher was once visited by an old

¹ Eckermann.



school-fellow, whom he had not seen for forty years. The host asked his guest whether he ever read his writings. "O, yes," replied the friend, "and I would do it oftener if I had fingers enough." "How am I to understand that?" asked Kant. "Ah, dear friend, your way of writing is so rich in parentheses, and brackets, and things that have to be taken into account beforehand! I set my first finger on one word, my second on another, and so on with the third and fourth, and before I turn over the page all my fingers are on it."

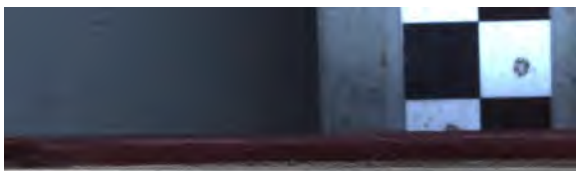
Kurz accuses the successors of Kant, as well as the master himself, and among these the worst sinner is Hegel. "Through him a multitude of new words came into the language, — an addition in no way justified, because there were good German expressions which would have answered, and which, even if justified, were objectionable as faultily formed. He was inexhaustibly prolific in giving birth to word-monsters, in which all the laws of language were set aside. In his complete unintelligibility it is often quite impossible to say what ideas he connected with the expressions.¹ What in the great man was bad," goes on the vigorous castigator, "became developed in the followers into repulsive affectation. They labored after the strangest forms of expression, to give their writings the appearance of philosophical depth, the result being an uncouth, artificial speech, — a kind of hieroglyphics."

¹ Compare Heine's opinion, given Chapter xvi.

The thinkers so criticised are undoubtedly peers of Plato and Bacon, — of the greatest minds of the world. Their systems are colossal intellectual structures, not subjects for popular study, but well worthy the attention of a select few in each generation, fitted to cope with them through special aptitude and acquirement. It is impossible nevertheless to resist the conviction that German thoroughness here, grand as it is, is sometimes excessive, — a waste of power upon minutiae of scholarship and speculation that can be of no profit to the world. As Hegel himself said: "Thoughts may be characterized by an inane depth, as well as by inane expansion."¹ In this chapter however it is not the value of the speculations that is discussed, but the style in which they are presented, and the effect of the bad example set by the philosophers upon those coming under their influence. One would say that the positive thinkers, with Herbert Spencer for their Corypheus, writing always so as to economize the attention of the recipient, in a style beneath which lie the thoughts perfectly clear, like objects beneath plate-glass without flaw, would have an immense advantage over their cloudy opponents. But when is man happier than when he is fog-blinded?

But unintelligibility may come from other causes than obscure statement. There are writers so prolix that the reader's mind becomes thoroughly wearied with the amount to be gone over, and at length loses its power of comprehending the diluted thought.

¹ Quoted by Gostwick and Harrison.



Hay, it is said, contains, in proportion to its bulk, but a small amount of nutriment. Graminivorous animals however are forced to eat it, because a certain mechanical distention of their stomachs is necessary before they can have the power to digest. Food in a compact form would make a donkey dyspeptic. Just so that style is faulty, it has been said, which presents ideas in a form too condensed. A certain distention of the mind seems to be necessary to the reception of thought. Many a truth which, stated in an epigram, would be indigestible, if trussed out into an essay can be swallowed and assimilated at once. Some such theory as the foregoing appears to have obtained a wide currency among German writers. The lavishness of your proper German authors is something appalling, exercised with no thought that the power of attention and the eyesight of the world are limited. Such stacks of hay as they have pitched into the manger of the poor, patient world! Take some of the most famous of them. The works of Wieland are comprised within forty-two volumes; those of Tieck are not less; Jean Paul Richter wrote sixty-five, many of them of no mean size; while the old mastersinger Hans Sachs wrote six thousand separate pieces. No one will deny that there is in all these truth and beauty of the finest; nor will he, if candid, deny that there is in them abundant hay,—hay of the stupidest, of which even the noble Bottom, yawning under Titania's endearments, might well have desired a "bottle." There is much room for discretion, on the part of authors, in the use of the

pitchfork ; and when readers express indiscriminate admiration for multivoluminous writers, it may be possible to detect a bray.

It has been said that the Germans have not the instinct of *selection*, “an instinct which seems almost confined to the French and English mind. It is the polar opposite of what is now sometimes called, by a false application of a mathematical term, *exhaustiveness*, formerly much practised by the Germans, and consisting, to use the happy phrase of Goldsmith, in a certain manner of ‘writing the subject to the dregs ;’ saying all that can be said on a given subject ; without considering how far it is to the purpose ; and valuing facts because they are true, rather than because they are significant.”¹

The greatest German writers—Luther, Lessing, Göthe for the most part, Schiller except in his metaphysical pieces, Heine—are clear as running brooks, as compared with many of their fellows, and, though prolific, never without substance. The writers of our own time are rising above the mistake. Taking German literature in the mass, however, it is right to say that as regards style there is a negligence or wilful violation of its rules which puts it below the English, and far below the French,—a superiority which the best Germans are willing to concede.

“The English,” says Göthe, “all write, as a rule, well,” * * * “as practical men, with eye di-

¹ E. J. Payne’s Introduction to Burke, quoted in A. S. Hill’s Rhetoric.

rected to the real." * * * "The French do not deny their general character in their style. They are of a social nature, and so never forget the public they address ; they try to be clear to convince the reader, and charming to please him. [As compared with them] one may reproach us with formlessness." ¹

If the Germans, while teaching us to think deeply, at the same time teach us to express ourselves obscurely, it will be hard to say the loss has not been greater than the gain. Says Göthe, who is so frequently quoted because he is the highest authority, alluding to a prominent German writer of his time : "Speaking honestly, I am sorry that a man undoubtedly of great natural gifts has been so affected by the philosophy of Hegel that a natural, unconstrained way of looking and thinking has been driven out in his case, and an artificial and clumsy style, not only of thinking, but expression, been formed. In his book we come upon places where the mind halts entirely, and we no longer know what we are reading." ²

When the Germans themselves speak with such severity of their writers, I may venture perhaps to quote an English judgment. De Quincey, after paying a high tribute to the French, — whose excellence of style he, like Göthe, considers due to the fact that they are of a social nature, a nation of talkers, — then speaks of English writers as being,

¹ Eckermann.

² Eckermann.

in comparison, far inferior. He pays his respects to the Germans at length, in these terms :

“The character of German prose is an object of legitimate astonishment. Whatever is bad in our own ideal of prose style, whatever is repulsive in our own practice, we see there carried to the most outrageous excess.” * * * “On throwing open the book [Kant’s “*Kritik der practischen Vernunft*”] we see a sentence exactly covering one whole octavo page of thirty-one lines, each line averaging from forty-five to forty-eight letters.” * * * “It is the prevailing character of his style.” * * * “A sentence is viewed by him, and by most of his countrymen, as a rude mould or elastic form, admitting of expansion to any possible extent. It is laid down as a rude outline, and then, by superstructure and epi-superstructure, it is gradually reared to a giddy altitude which no one can follow. Yielding to his natural impulse of subjoining all additions, or exceptions, or modifications,—not in the shape of separate consecutive sentences, but as intercalations and stuffings of one original sentence,—Kant might naturally have written a book from beginning to end in one vast hyperbolical sentence.”¹

The besetting defect of German writers has been sufficiently considered. It is an obscurity, proceeding sometimes from a certain unconscious slowness and circuitousness, sometimes from a wilful imitation of the conduct of the cuttle-fish, sometimes from want of the sense of proportion, which leads

¹ Essay on Style.

to undue dwelling upon the trivial until the subject "is written to its dregs." Now, what can be said as to the cause of the fault? Matthew Arnold, speaking sharply of the "verbose, ponderous, round-about, inane, in German literature," attributes it to "the want of the pressure of a great national life, with its practical discipline, its ever-active traditions."¹ We can go deeper for the cause. It would be truer to say that the want of a great national life has itself been another effect of that cause, — a cause which lies in the very nature of the German himself. Unfavorable criticism is an ungracious task. Where the Germans seem to hit the truth themselves, let them speak. Here is a noble poem of Freiligrath's, whose beauty is not greater than its truth:

DEUTSCHLAND IST HAMLET.

Germany's Hamlet! Without sound,
 Each night where stand the portals barred
 The buried freedom walks its round,
 And beckons to the men on guard.
 There stands it tall, in steel arrayed,
 And to the prince, delaying sadly,
 It says: "Avenge! on him draw blade
 Who filled mine ear with poison deadly."

He listens tremblingly, until
 His soul has seized the dreadful fact.
 "Aye, thou poor ghost, avenge I will!"
 But will he in the crisis act?
 He finds no means his breast to steel;
 He palters on with doubt and vision.
 Before the deed, his soul doth feel
 No earnest, spirited decision.

¹ 1 Quarterly Review.

Too much the man doth sit and creep;
Studied too much in bed he hath.
And now, because his blood's asleep,
He's grown too fat and scant of breath.
Such poring over books was wrong;
His best work is, precisely, thinking;
He stuck in Wittenberg too long
In lecture-halls, or — halls for drinking.

And so determination fails.
"The time will bring some plan;" he feigns
Insanity; in verses rails,
Soliloquizing o'er his pains.
While still unfixed, contrives dumb-show;
And if he nerves himself to fight one,
Then must Polonius Kotzebue ¹
Receive the stab, and not the right one.

He loiters woful, broodingly;
Excuses makes, — doth go and come;
He lets them send him over sea;
At length comes moralizing home;
Shoots off an arsenal of wit;
Talks about "kings of shreds and patches;"
As for a deed, — why, God forbid!
No such resolve his spirit catches.

The foil, at length, he seizes fast;
Now to fulfil his oath he tries.
But ah, too late! the act's the last;
Himself outstretched on earth he lies.
There by the slain ones, whom his hate
With sudden, shameful death disgraces,
He lifeless lies, and fickle fate
The Dane with Fortinbras replaces.

¹ A felicitous touch. Kotzebue, "the frivolous writer," after a residence in Russia, returned to Germany, where he lived, it was believed, as a spy in the interest of Russia. A young student, on fire with patriotic feeling, at length assassinated him, — a thrust as wild and useless as Hamlet's stab through the arras.

Thank God! not yet so far; 'tis well!
 Four of the drama's acts are past.
 Hero, take care the parallel
 Appear not in the fifth and last!
 Early and late we hope. O rise,
 With manful blows the danger meeting!
 Help with decision brave and wise,
 To gain its right, the ghost entreating.

This moment seize, — the earliest chance!
 Yet there is time, — the sword wield free!
 Before with rapier brought from France
 Some fell Laertes poisons thee!
 Ere clattering comes a Northern host,
 Thine heritage so precious keeping.
 Beware! for not from Norway's coast,
 This time, I fear, the troop is sweeping.

Only decide, — free stands the path.
 Forth to the lists with manful fire;
 Hold in thy heart thy plighted faith,
 Avenging thy perturbed sire!
 Why dost thou brood unceasingly!
 And yet I ought to blame thee never;
 I am, myself, a piece of thee,
 Dreamer and palterer forever!

Freiligrath, in his poem, has in mind the political, not the literary, history of his country; but the characteristics he so finely sketches will explain the shortcomings in both fields. "Germany is Hamlet," — the explanation is sufficient. Our time however has seen a change. The poet wrote before the events of 1870. As if the nation had heeded his summons, it has taken care that, after four acts,

— the parallel
 Appear not in the fifth and last.

The nation is not, indeed, free in the American sense, but the despotism that oppressed it for ages is utterly swept away ; if a master still rules, he is, at any rate, one beloved by his subjects, ruling with their consent. In politics, it is Hamlet no longer ; perhaps it will be so in literature.

There is nothing more to be said in abatement of the glory of German writers. That the literature they have given the world deserves the highest estimation needs in this book no further setting forth ; the story has been told in the pages that precede. To attempt to estimate the comparative excellence of German literature, to say whether it is greater or less than what the ancients, what England, Italy, or France, have achieved, is a task from which we may well shrink. Whether the literature of Germany or England is the grander structure was disputed in the time of Klopstock, a hundred years ago, drawing from him an ode in which the English and German muses — the former flushed with many triumphs, the latter just aroused from long sleep — are represented side by side. But the singer of the “Messias,” while he represents the contest, does not venture to indicate the victor, — a reticence which Madame de Stäel, who quotes the ode, and whom we may suppose to be an impartial judge, highly approves.¹

Klopstock, however, shows a touch of patriotic arrogance in hinting, in his day, at a rivalry upon

¹ L'Allemagne.



equal terms between the muses of England and Germany. The former had seen its most glorious time ; the latter was just beginning to vindicate itself after a lethargy of centuries. For our time such a comparison would show no overweening confidence. If the single name of Shakespeare be excepted, whose supremacy the Germans are as willing to accord as we are to claim it, there is no English name which cannot be matched from the great literature which has been the subject of our study.





APPENDIX.

NOTE A (p. 243).

Opitz should receive more extended mention than the few lines devoted to him on page 243. He was a shrewd, timeserving courtier. Although a Protestant, he became a servant and confidential friend of Catholic princes who persecuted without mercy his fellow-believers. Scarcely a breath of genuine poetic spirit appears in his verses. For more than a hundred years, however, he enjoyed an immense prestige; he was called the father of German poetry, and it has only in our time become possible to give right proportions to the fame of the "Silesian Swan." His celebrated critical treatise, "Von der Deutschen Poeterei," contains the principles upon which he wrote, and which he sought, so successfully, to bring into vogue. The work occupies itself with external matters, for it was not until Lessing's day that a critic was found who could treat of poetry in its essence. It is no slight desert, however, to have given German poetry a nobler and more artistic form. Through him the speech of Luther became the language of the poets, who forsook also foreign idioms and dialectic peculiarities. Opitz restored dignity to poetic expression. Through his influence, the laws of prosody which prevail even at the present day were recognized and established. It can moreover be said for Opitz, that, at a time when the literature of Germany was at its lowest, he won for poetry written in his native tongue a respectful hearing among the learned

and powerful, — an achievement which he accomplished by a wise choice of subjects, and a treatment which gained respect.

NOTE B (p. 421).

Schiller cannot be considered quite spotless. He is often contrasted in moral respects with Göthe, greatly to the disadvantage of the latter. His relations with one woman, at least, must be set down as blameworthy. Charlotte von Kalb was a beautiful and gifted woman, the wife of a nobleman, whom she did not love, whom she had been forced to marry, and who had sought her solely for her estate. Schiller, who was slightly her senior, became acquainted with her in Mannheim, when he was twenty-five. They felt at once for one another an earnest admiration, which soon became love. Schiller's passion wrought itself, soon after, into the tragedy of "Don Carlos." When he left Mannheim, at the end of a year's intimacy, he parted from the Frau von Kalb with a kiss, and assurances of undying devotion; and soon after appear the "Free-thinking of Passion,"¹ and "Resignation," poems inspired by his hopeless affection, containing a protest against the Christian code of morals. It would be unjust to suppose that any criminal relation existed between Schiller and Charlotte von Kalb. The connection may be compared, in some ways, with that between Göthe and Charlotte von Stein. The lovers came together at a later period, in Weimar, and the intimacy was renewed. When Schiller, at length, married Charlotte von Lengenfeld, an estrangement came to pass, followed, however, by a reconciliation and continued friendship.

We find Schiller, then, as well as his great com-

¹ "Freigeisterei der Leidenschaft."



peer, involved in a passion, far transcending platonic bounds, for a woman married to another. Admitting that he was culpable, it must be said, in fairness, that there was in the guilty relation every palliating circumstance. Charlotte von Kalb, bound hand and foot, had been delivered to an unloved husband, who sought her merely for mercenary motives. The German society of the last century saw in the connection nothing unusual, perhaps nothing deserving of criticism. The social standing of neither one of them appears to have been affected in the least. The Duchess Amalie of Weimar invited them together to her æsthetic teas. There was not a hint of exclusion from any circle. If Göthe, however, is to be judged harshly for his intimacy with the Frau von Stein, Schiller should suffer also.

NOTE C (p. 474).

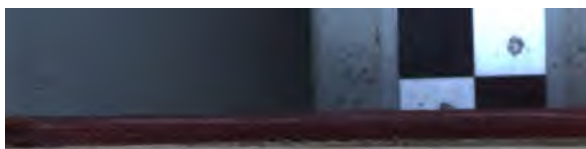
The most elaborate criticism which the "Short History of German Literature" has received is that of the Rev. Dr. F. H. Hedge, Professor of German Literature in Harvard University, published in *The Unitarian Review* for March, 1879. The author of the "Short History" regards Dr. Hedge as the first authority in America on many points in German scholarship. That Dr. Hedge has thought fit to speak publicly of the "Short History" as in many ways worthy of high praise, the author honestly counts as among the greatest distinctions that have ever come to him.

Dr. Hedge, together with his praise, points out very frankly the defects of the book. The author feels that upon several points, where his critic takes him sharply to task, a good defence is possible, and proposes now to make some examination of the doctor's strictures.

As to what constitutes adequacy in such a book, Dr. Hedge should be an excellent judge. For more than fifty

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that the doctor's estimate is quite unaccountable, far lower than that of critics of the first reputation, — Mathew Arnold for instance, who declares him to be the greatest name in German literature since the death of Göthe. If the "Short History" has erred in giving to Heine the prominence of a special chapter, the author begs leave to submit that he has the countenance of those who are to be held as masters.

The third count in Dr. Hedge's indictment, — that of inaccuracy and insufficient scholarship in the treatment of some departments, — is a grave one. The author of the "Short History" feels that he is set in a very unfavorable light before the wide circle whom Dr. Hedge will influence by his great name and earnest declarations, and cannot suffer the charge to pass without trying to justify himself. The account of the "Romantic School" the critic finds especially unsatisfactory. A German author, speaking of a poem (by one of that school), compares it to a cloud, opposite to which stands the reader, like Polonius in Hamlet, "only more honestly doubtful than he, and cannot tell whether it is most like a camel, a weasel, or a whale." In general, the tendency known as Romanticism is as hard to grasp as is the poem alluded to. Dr. Hedge suggests what, to us, is an entirely new conception, describing in such terms what looms in German writers as a whale, or at least a camel, that scarcely so much as a weasel is left. The assertion that Jean Paul was a precursor of the Romantic School, which Dr. Hedge treats most contemptuously, was made upon the authority of Brandes, the brilliant author of "*Hauptströmungen der Literatur des 19en Jahrhunderts.*" "Jean Paul is in many respects the precursor (Vorläufer) of Romanticism. He is a Romanticist before all, through the measureless caprice with which he goes to work as an artist. He is moreover a Romanticist through his unbounded

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reputable books to support a position quite different from that of Dr. Hedge, that Romanticism, namely, was a development in literature, proceeding in part from Göthe and Schiller, in part from the great "heroes of the Kantian line," modified in ways which cannot be specified here, until at length, near the time of Göthe's death, its force was expended.

Dr. Hedge "finds it difficult to keep cool" at the "wild and amazing proposition" that Transcendentalism in America is in any way the fruit of, or connected with, Romanticism. His opinion here is entitled to the greatest respect, connected, as he was, with the Transcendentalists at the outset, a prominent figure in the movement. If the "Short History" is in error, at least it did not deserve to be so rudely rebuked. The humble effort of the book is to epitomize for plain readers the conclusions of the important men. Dr. Hedge, in his denial, is at direct issue with famous authorities. With Romanticism as Dr. Hedge describes it, Transcendentalism may have no more connection than with the "Wars of the Roses;" but we submit, in all respect, that the doctor's Romanticism is *sui generis*. With Romanticism as *others* have described it, the affinity between it and Transcendentalism is very plain. Or have we utterly failed to grasp that other nebulous entity, Transcendentalism? We have supposed that we might trust Mr. O. B. Frothingham for a true account. If so, Transcendentalism came to New England from Germany, in part, directly; in part through the medium of Coleridge, who reproduced Schelling so nearly that he is believed to have plagiarized from him; and of Carlyle, whom we have ventured to call a spiritual child of Jean Paul. It took its origin in Kant, flowing downward to Fichte, Jacobi, and Schelling. "But," says Mr. Frothingham, "it was through the literature of Germany that the Transcendental philosophy

chiefly communicated itself. Götne, Richter, and Novalis were more persuasive teachers than Jacobi, Fichte, and Schelling."¹ We insist, with all respect for Dr. Hedge, that names of the utmost weight can be cited for the position that Romanticism, too, found in Göthe one of its starting-points, in Richter its precursor, in Novalis its consummate flowering; and that it is neither "wild nor amazing" to say that in the idealism of Emerson, in the reactionary career of Brownson, in vapory rhapsody and Orphic utterance, we have echoes and analogues of what was just dying away in the heart of the old world. We are willing to defer in this matter to Dr. Hedge, but consider the sharpness of his correction quite uncalled for.

Dr. Hedge's condemnation, however, falls most severely upon certain statements respecting the Catholicism of Novalis. "The author says of Novalis, that he abjured Protestantism for the older faith. Who told Mr. Hosmer that? Such is not the fact. Such apostacy was, for Novalis, a moral impossibility. He was Moravian to the very root of his being. If our author had studied Kurz, on whom he professedly bases his account of the Romantic School, with closer attention, he would have learned from that authority also, that Novalis did not abjure Protestantism. (Vol. III. p. 163)."

We beg the student of German to open Kurz, and convince himself that in what we now translate, from the page to which the critic himself refers us, we do not at all distort the writer's meaning: "The tendency toward Catholicism could not develop itself in Novalis in the same degree as with his friends; and although we find here and there indications of it, they are of a more external kind. Even the fragment written in 1799, 'Die

¹ Transcendentalism in New England, p. 51.



Christenheit in Europa,'¹ although it begins from an exclusively Catholic standpoint, shows in its development that he comprehended Catholicism in quite a different way from the other Romanticists, whose views, however, incontestably, had an essential influence upon this treatise. Generally speaking, Catholicism, for his soul so inclined to introversion, was much too material for him to remain permanently attracted by it; and we can understand how it was that toward the end of his life he inclined more to the views of the Moravians than the Papacy." So far from learning from this passage that Novalis did not abjure Protestantism, we find here a distinct admission that at one time in his career he was the author of writings that expressed Catholic views. The facts in the case are these: The family from which he sprang was Moravian; at the end of his life he appears to have returned to the faith of his childhood; but there was a period in his career, and an important one, in which he shared fully the reactionary spirit of many of the Romanticists, approving transubstantiation, glorifying the Romish hierarchy and order of Jesuits, denouncing the Reformation, urging the hurtfulness of knowledge, in a manner which could not have been surpassed by the most thorough-going Ultramontane. Whether any formal renunciation of Protestantism ever took place, we do not know. If the term "abjured" must be understood to imply so much, another one should have been used; but that Novalis turned his back on Protestantism, and was thoroughly in sympathy, in his vigorous years, with Roman Catholicism, cannot be questioned. We propose to substantiate this statement from his own lips. The sentences which follow are from the treatise, "Die

¹ Kurz gives the title wrong; it should be, "Christenheit oder Europa."

Christenheit oder Europa," to which Kurz makes allusion: —

"Those were beautiful, brilliant days when Europe was a Christian land, — when one Christianity occupied the continent. Rightfully did the wise head of the church oppose the insolent education of men at the expense of their holy sense, and untimely, dangerous discoveries in the realm of knowledge. He forbade, therefore, audacious thinkers to maintain publicly that the earth is an unimportant planet; for he knew well that men at the same time that they lose respect for their dwelling-place and their earthly habitation, would lose it also for their heavenly home, — would prefer limited knowledge to infinite faith. This great interior schism (Protestantism) which destroying wars accompanied was a remarkable sign of the hurtfulness of culture. The insurgents separated the inseparable, divided the indivisible church, and tore themselves wickedly out of the universal Christian union through which, and in which alone, genuine and enduring regeneration was possible. Luther treated Christianity in general arbitrarily, mistook its spirit, introduced another letter and another religion, — the sacred, universal sufficiency of the Bible, namely. With the Reformation, Christianity went to destruction (mit der Reformation war's um die Christenheit gethan). Fortunately for the old constitution, a newly arisen order, the Jesuits, now appeared, upon which the dying spirit of the hierarchy seemed to have poured out its last gifts. In Germany one can already point out with full certainty the traces of a new world, — a great time of reconciliation, a new golden age, a Saviour dwelling among men, under countless forms visible to the believers, eaten as bread and wine (als Brod und Wein verzehrt), embraced as the beloved, breathed as air, and heard as word and song. The old Catholic belief was Christianity applied, become



living. Its presence everywhere in life, its love for art, its deep humanity, the indissolubility of its marriages, its humane sympathy, its joy in poverty, obedience and fidelity, make it unmistakably a genuine religion. It is made pure by the stream of time; it will eternally make happy this earth. Shall not Protestantism finally cease, and give place to a new, more durable church?"

The author of the "Short History" believes that proof enough has been brought forward to substantiate the statement that Novalis was at one time, to all intents and purposes, a Catholic. The citations produce no effect, however, upon the mind of Dr. Hedge. In a rejoinder to the communication in which they were submitted, he reaffirms his previous declaration that Novalis was never any thing but a Protestant. In the passage cited from Kurz, he sees no admission that Novalis was at one time a Catholic in his sympathies. "It proves, if it proves any thing, the very opposite." The treatise, "Christenheit oder Europa," he refuses to admit as evidence; we beg the reader to notice upon what grounds: because, "when read for their judgment as to fitness for publication, to a committee of his friends, F. Schlegel, the Catholic, being one of them, it was unanimously rejected, on the ground that its historic view was too weak and inadequate, the inferences arbitrary, and the whole essay feeble; its defects evident to every one acquainted with the subject." It may be weak, but can Dr. Hedge deny that Novalis wrote the paper? Did the "committee of friends" who rejected it deny that Novalis wrote it? No one has denied that it came from his hand, nor can it be denied that the mind from which it proceeded was thoroughly Romish in its sympathies. Schlegel, at least, of the "committee of friends," repented of his decision, and afterwards published it. "What settles the question," says Dr. Hedge, "with an unappealable verdict from the highest authority, is the declaration of Tieck,

Novalis's most intimate friend and his biographer: 'I may confidently affirm that to my friend Hardenberg (Novalis) this transition to another Christian communion from the Lutheran, in which he was born, was utterly impossible.''' Shall we believe Tieck, or Novalis himself? Dr. Hedge prefers to do the former; the author of the "Short History" prefers to do the latter; all the more since in taking that course he has the countenance of the highest German authorities that can be named. Brandes, Rudolph Gottschall, Hettner,¹ K. R. Hagenbach,² and August Koberstein, all quote the "Christenheit oder Europa" of Novalis, most of them at great length, as a work which they are compelled to recognize, and as unmistakably Catholic in its positions. Koberstein (whose work, let it be remembered, according to Dr. Hedge, is the most important of the German literary histories) is especially full and emphatic in his treatment of the matter, asserting not only the Catholicism of Novalis, but taking him as the especial type and spokesman, in this respect, of the reactionary Romanticists. "Novalis," he says, "in his whole religious way of thinking, and according to his historical views (however near the former might approach Pantheism), inclined toward Catholicism in its mediæval hierarchical form and historical significance. From this fragment (Christenheit oder Europa) it can best be seen what ideas relating to religion, and its connection with all the higher directions of life, were talked about at that time (1799) in the circle of Romanticists at Jena, what hopes they connected with a re-birth of true Catholicism," etc.³ For a last authority, Dr. Hedge himself admits that, if Falk is to be believed,

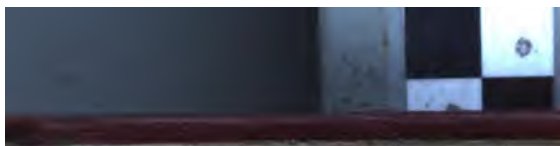
¹ "Die romantische Schule."

² "Kirchengeschichte des 18en and 19en Jahrhunderts aus dem Standpunkte des evangelischen Protestantismus betrachtet."

³ Die deutsche National-literatur, IV. pp. 794-799. The edition used is that published in Leipsic in 1873, edited by Karl Bartsch.

it was declared by Göthe that Novalis had obliged his age by becoming a Catholic. The author of the "Short History" rests his case here, although he believes he might make it even stronger. There are few copies of the works of Novalis in America, but any reader of German may find in Kurz's History of German Literature, — a book which may easily be consulted, — among the selections from the writings of Novalis, poems full of Catholic spirit. A hymn is quoted, which could have been written only by one who accepted the doctrine of Transubstantiation. In the "Crusader's Song," "the Holy Virgin hovers, borne by angels, above the wild battle, where each one whom the sword has smitten awakes in her mother-arms;" and each stanza has such a tone as might have proceeded from the soul of some mediæval monk. Enough, however, has been said; and now we respectfully submit that the assertion of the Catholicism of Novalis did not deserve the curt contradiction which Dr. Hedge has seen fit to administer. We believe that the candid student of German literature, making himself familiar with the evidence upon this point, will be amazed to find a scholar of Dr. Hedge's reputation and position occupying such ground.

The author of the "Short History of German Literature" has felt forced to say a deprecatory word. He does not presume for a moment to measure his acquirements in this wide field with those of his venerable critic, in comparison with whom he acknowledges himself a mere tyro. At the same time, he demands just treatment; he begs that errors into which he has fallen through following respectable authorities may have patient and courteous correction, and he cannot let unfounded accusations of inaccuracy pass without refutation.



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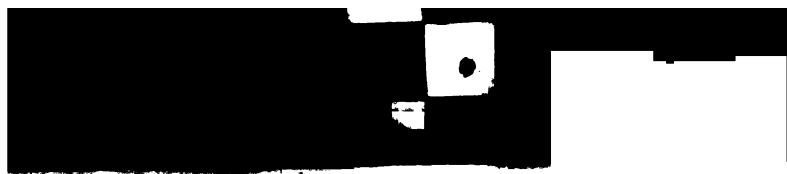
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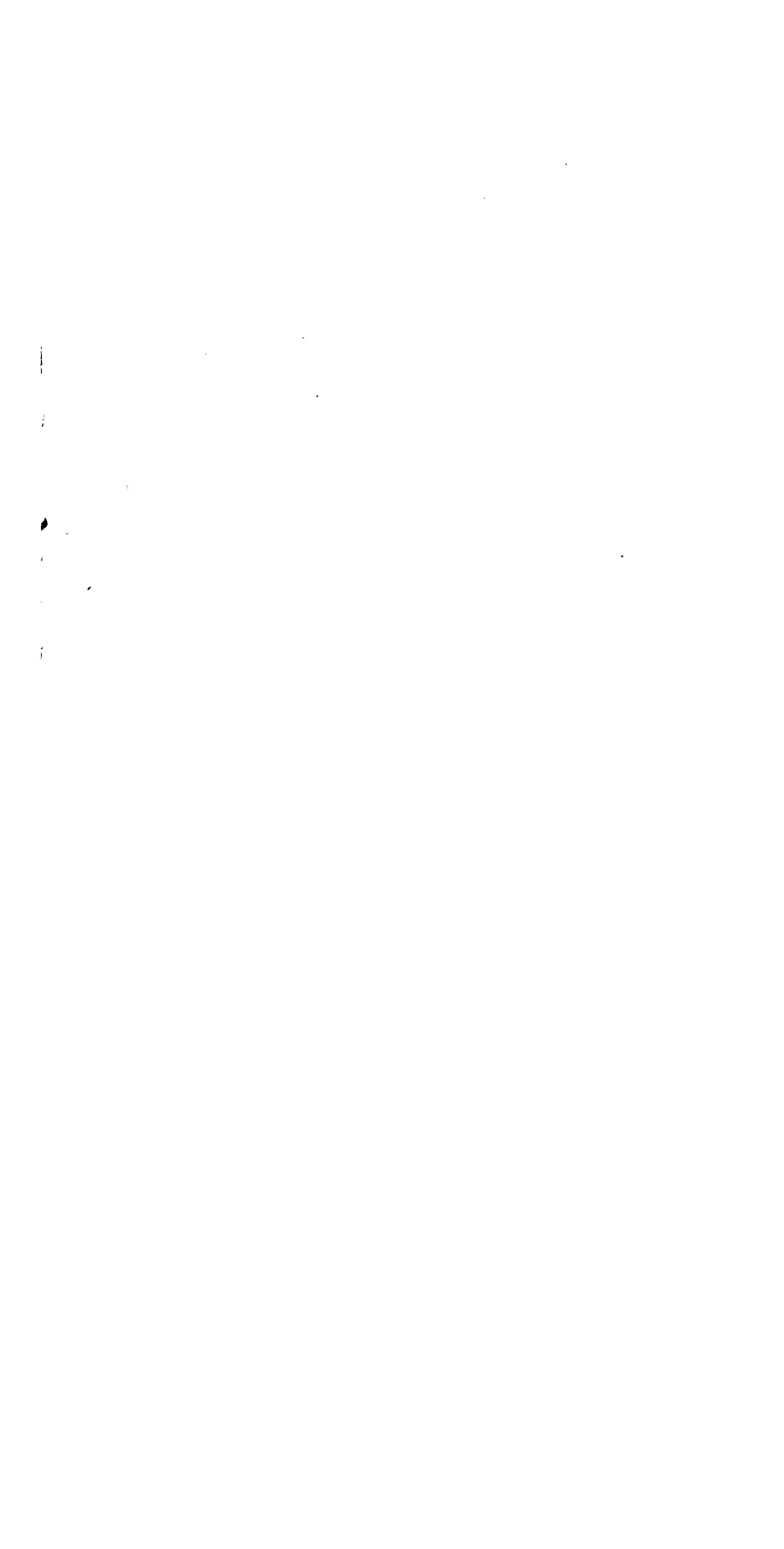
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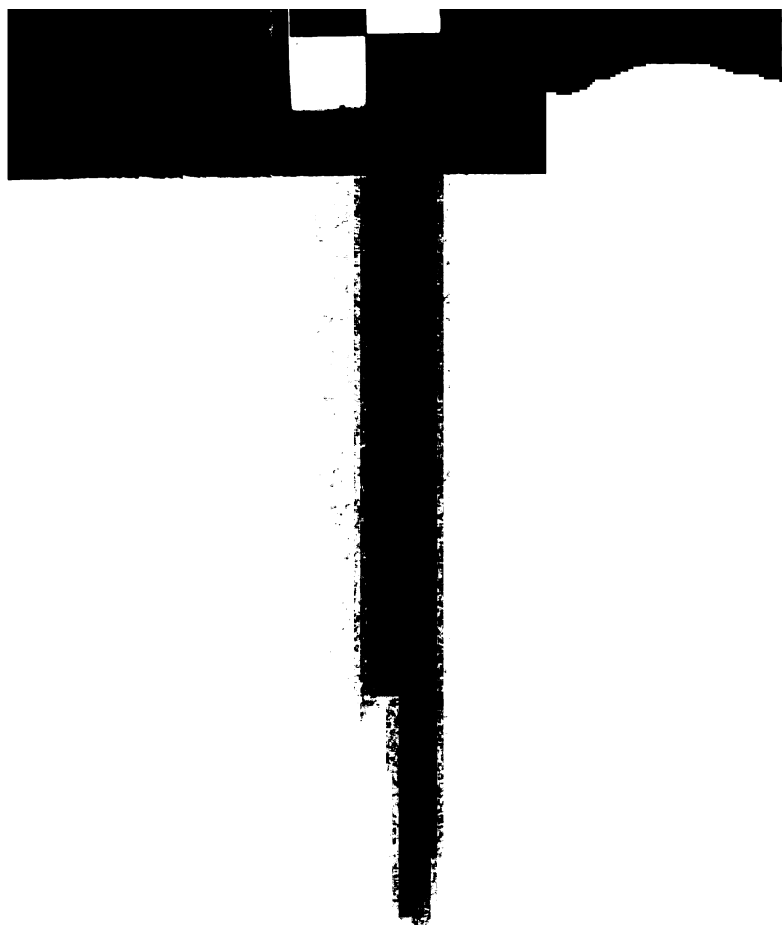
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